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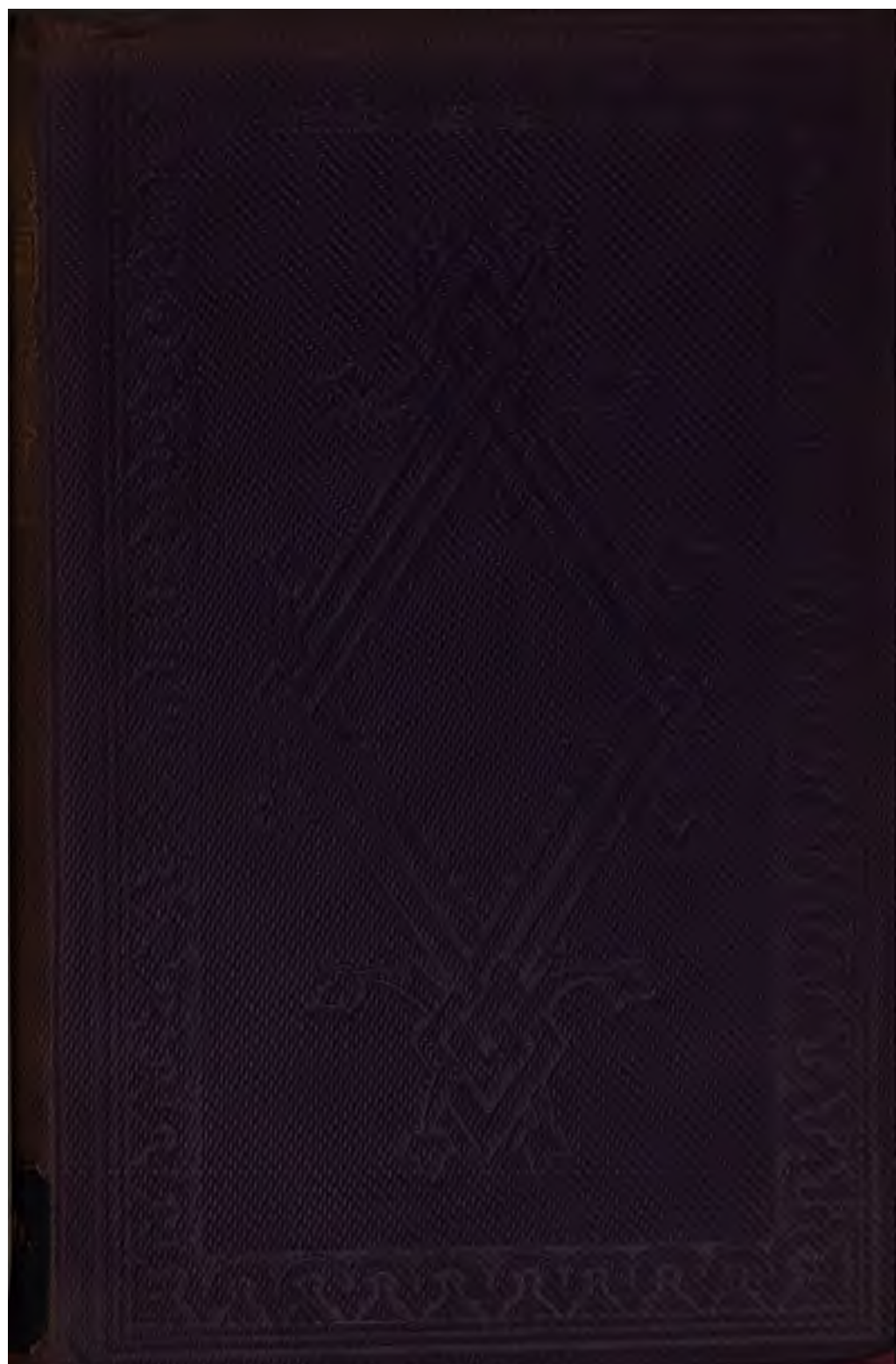
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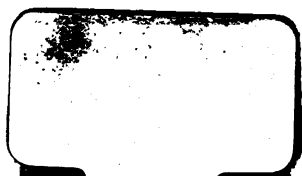


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ALL FOR THE BEST.

VOL. III.

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ALL FOR THE BEST:

A Story of Quiet Life.

"So, He bringeth them to the haven where they would be."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ALL FOR THE BEST.

CHAPTER I.

Braeton, June 29th.—Oh! how I wish these summer days were over! These long, warm, motionless, sunshiny summer days, they weary me so! In winter time, when people draw together by the fire and talk about things in a cheery sociable way, for the mere sake of keeping themselves warm, the time gets over more quickly; but sixteen long hours of light and sunshine—oh! how dreary they are! Shame on me that I should complain of June beauty, but so it is.

I believe every one feels it so—at least, I mean, every one who is not thoroughly at rest. There is such an indescribable lassitude and monotony in this constant presence of nature, seeing her

go droning on with her work, plodding unceasingly over those vast, mysterious processes of growth and renovation, which make ours so puny, so feeble. One does not feel this so much in winter. I wonder if there are any people who never feel it at all, people who do not know what it is to look back on a memory such as mine, and forward to a future so blank sometimes, and dreary.

But all suffering has its lull; all sorrow belonging to this life is hushed sooner or later. Mine is. I feel sometimes as if rest were very near at hand, and if not, I am learning now to bear all there is for me to bear in a strength greater than my own; and even the very thought of that other strength is in itself a sort of rest. Perhaps it is in this way that God is bringing me to the haven where I would be. Once safely anchored there, I shall not think the past has been too bitter.

Last night, whilst Stephen Roden and Maud were sitting in the garden together, I went down to Marbrook to see Miss Nunly. She had got an old cabinet spread open before her, which usually

stands in a corner of the wainscoted parlour, and there was such a sad look on her face that I would have come away again, thinking I had interrupted her in the midst of some painful duty she was obliged to attend to ; but she said she would rather I stayed, and then she took out her work, and we had a long pleasant chat together—no, not exactly pleasant,—I should never describe my conversations with Miss Nunly by that word,—but quiet, and thoughtful, and enjoyable, with a half haze of sadness over a good many things that we said, yet with that feeling of thorough unreserve and true-heartedness which makes even the speaking of sad things lose half its bitterness. Who could talk with anything but earnestness, or with a quiet, chastened sort of temper, in that quaint old wainscoted parlour of hers, with the elm trees shading off the light, and beating their branches against the window, and the still, silent Mar river drifting on past the garden, and the rooks cawing with such eerie melancholy sound from the old abbey towers close by—who indeed?

I wonder what Miss Nunly's past has been.

What has turned her hair grey already, for she is not so very old? How have those long lines grown upon her forehead, which I see so plainly there when she goes off into one of her thoughtful moods, and looks out and away over the hills for almost an hour together without ever speaking a word? What makes her gaze at me with such an earnest, wistful look when I talk in a sort of off-hand way—as I do sometimes, just to hide the real truth—of enjoying life, and being happy while we can? And why, when occasionally we have been reading together what I call violent poetry—poetry that dips into feelings of which I know nothing—and I take the liberty of expressing a little doubt as to its sincerity, does she check me gravely, and say, in that quiet voice of hers, “It is quite true, it is *quite* true”?

What has she known, I wonder? what has she suffered? I have sometimes thought I would like to ask her; but then, again, there is a dignity and a self-containment about Miss Nunly which keeps you from in any way prying into her inner life, or questioning her of those thoughts

and feelings which she has reserved to herself. Then, after all, if I had her confidence, would I give her mine? would I tell her all that sorrowful and heavy-laden past which no one has looked upon but myself? Would I let her see that dark, dark thread which has woven itself into my life? And have I any right to ask from her more than I am willing to give? Perhaps, too, she does not like people to pity her; no more do I. Of all things, pity, given in such a way that you are expected to receive it as sympathy, is hardest to bear. No! Miss Nunly; for a little while longer you and I will be content to be strangers to each other's inmost self, bravely laying by in each other's presence our individual griefs, and waiting for fuller sympathy until that bright coming time when we shall know even as we are known.

Miss Gabbatis has got that little Sally of hers married to one of the under-gardeners at Braeton Park, and she gave us such a comical account of it this morning. The young couple have opened an establishment in the fruit line, at a little pill-box of a cottage, turning round the corner as you

go to Mrs. Herman Kaye's, and, according to Miss G.'s account, are as happy as two little birds. Ah, well-a-day! I hope it will last. I mean to ask mamma to buy her fruit there for preserving this summer, which will be a help to Roger, and also give me an excuse for calling in and making my own private observations on this new species of ornithological felicity.

I am going to have Maud to myself, for a little while at least, just now, for Stephen Roden is off into Scotland, and will not be back again until the end of the week at the very least. He has gone to make some arrangements on that estate which the Duke of Chartermayne has just been buying, and was sent away at hardly a moment's notice. I wonder who would be agent to a fidgety Duke, and I wonder who would care to have his name in the peerage, or even to have the neat little competence of 60,000*l.* a year, when that distinction involves, as it does in my Lord Duke's case, the necessity of putting so many people out of the way, and making such untimely upheavals just for his own personal convenience. But it will soon be over, for Stephen resigns his agency

on the first of July. He started at five this morning, and Maud was up in time to say good-bye to him as he passed our garden on his way to the Marbrook station.

Getting up early in the morning to see one's friends off by the early train I don't like at all, and it's what I never did for anybody. A dreary, dry, matter-of-fact, commonplace duty enough, unbrightened by any romantic illusions whatsoever; unhallowed by any of those fascinating associations which hover round the charmed hour of eventide, and invest even its most ordinary belongings with a certain serene delight. Getting up in a morning, I mean of course at such an untimely hour of the morning as one *must* rise to see people off by the north train—I very much wonder and misdoubt if any, even the most heroic, ever performed such a feat with even a moderate degree of pleasure. Altogether, apart from the disagreeable consciousness that you are about to see the last of your friend, there is a certain unmistakable dreariness in landing downstairs before any one else is stirring, in unbarring the window-shutters and letting in the first faint beams of

morning light—if there be any—upon an untidy room, an undusted carpet, an unblackleaded grate, unpolished furniture, curtains tied up in knots, cushions thrust into by-corners, and those multitudinous symptoms of uncomfortableness which reign paramount in the lower regions before the matutinal avocations of the housemaid have commenced. Appalling, even to the stoutest heart, is the thought of being aroused from dreamy slumbers by the stroke of three, four, or five o'clock, and having to turn out unbreakfasted and half dressed to contend with the vicissitudes of another day. There is a sorrow, known only to those who have experienced it, in groping with half-dazed faculties one's weary way to bolted doors, and through dark passages, and down unaccustomed staircases, in quest of bread loaves and cold milk ; stumbling helplessly along the *terra incognita* of the culinary regions, and vainly endeavouring to collect one's slumberous energies for the unwonted tax upon them. Verily and truly, if ever I feel a more than ordinary degree of thankfulness to our little maid Joan, it is when she saves me the trouble of getting up in a morning.

And yet Maud did it all for Stephen Roden. Don't let me laugh at her : I would have done it myself, I know I would, for Philip Lowe, and oh how glad I should have been to have the chance of doing it ! There, then ! I cannot jest any more after that name ; it brings too much of the past, of four little months of hope which will never, never come back any more.

Well, I will not complain ; at least I will try not. I often say *that*, but somehow or other the feeling comes over me again, and all that I might have been, all that I might have done, rises so very clearly before me. Henceforth I will be very contented, I will take what good is left me, and be thankful for it. The end comes to all in time, and what we have to do, what I have to do, is to attend it quietly and patiently. Only, when I see Maud so happy, when I watch her life go rippling on so calmly, so peacefully, when I look into that still face of hers, and see there no trace of anything but a joy which I can never know again, it does seem very hard.

I won't write about it any more ; I won't think about it either, for that is just as bad. Yonder is

Maud pacing up and down in the sunshine. The white jasmine flowers shower thickly upon her as she comes past that long branch up here, beside the drawing-room window. There, they are dropping round her now, and crushing under her feet ; before the last of them has fallen, before the first tinge of brown has crept out upon that long branch, my little sister Maud will be Stephen Roden's wife.

It is very calm to-night. This half-blown rose, looking in at the window upon me, has not the slightest sway, but rests poised and motionless upon its stem. How bonnie it looks — the leaves almost white as they grow out into the sunshine, but deepening to pure brilliant red as they fold closer and closer down upon each other away from the light ! Is it so with other things besides roses, I wonder — the finest colours always farthest in the shade ? I like to sit here and think about these things, and dream over them for long together. I like to look out on such a tranquil, sunshiny night as this, over this June landscape, with the feeling that I have nothing else to do but look ; that I may sit here for hours and hours,

and nobody will miss me, nobody will ask for me. I like to study this nature picture, to take it in and fill myself with it; to let the feeling of it just flow upon me and around me, without my taking the trouble to think why it is so beautiful, or why it is that it rests me so to look upon it. I like to look out over that long range of distances that we get from this side the house, past those two great beech trees; they standing foremost, dark and clear, and well defined, their network of interlacing branches peering out through a veil of greenery. Beyond them, a little way off, the old grey church, clustered round with foliage, just near enough for me to distinguish the characteristic sway of the branches and the manifold changeful tints of the leaves. Past that again, the sweep of Braeton plantation, with a beautiful soft blue haze of atmosphere lying upon it, and breaking down its outline. Behind it the craggy moorland rises, purple, black, and brown, with rifts here and there where the heather grows in channels that winter torrents have worn. And then, farther away still, past all these, our Downshire hills

peaking up along the horizon, steeped in the softest, tenderest, grey-like tints, melting away fainter and fainter, until I cannot tell them from the clouds.

Yes, it is very beautiful. It makes one feel quiet to look at it. If only we would match it in our own hearts; if only *we* could be so calm, so at rest. And still Maud walks up and down here; and still the jasmine flowers fall upon her and drop to her feet; and still that utter calm shines through her face; and, looking at her, the old feeling comes over me again, and again I say it is hard, it is very hard.

But, after all, it is only a little while. The weariness will be past by and by. There will be nothing of this to think of, nothing of this to murmur over, in that glorious coming time

“When, in the great eternity,
We shall awake and find it day.”

CHAPTER II.

How pretty that Braeton dining-room always looked in the morning time; never prettier, though, than when Maud came into it the Friday after Stephen Roden went away. There had been rain in the night—she was afraid there would, for the sun had gone down behind a pile of yellow clouds the evening before; but it had cleared away now, and left nothing but a fresher tint of green on the grass and woods, and a sweeter fragrance in the air that came wafting in through the open glass door. Stray leaves from the great bush rose outside the window, danced in and out, and fluttered round the room, strewing the carpet with their pinky bloom, and lying all soft and dewy on the shining white damask cloth. The sunlight, too, came flashing in, bright and merry;

it smiled a sparkling welcome to the silver urn; it flickered over the snowy china; it dazzled in and out upon the fretwork of the crystal ewer; then on to Maud's stand of freshly gathered flowers, where, after dancing about from spray to spray of moss and fern, and dallying with the long drooping clusters of fuchsia until they drooped lower still and blushed a deeper crimson, and peeping here and there through the delicate jasmine flowers, and running over the glossy leaves of the evergreen barberry, making them shine again, it finally nestled down into the heart of a half-blown white rose, and amused itself by putting little fanciful spangles and sparkles in the dew-drops which lay there still. The sparrows that Maud had taught to come for their breakfast hopped coyly to her feet as she sat within the open door, and looked up askance with their bright little black eyes, first at her, and then at the plate of crumbs which lay beside her, until one saucy fellow, more adventurous than the rest, came bodily into the room, and boldly set to work upon it. And Maud's pet canary, whose cage was in the verandah above, swung merrily back-

wards and forwards upon his ring, and loudly vociferated his praises of the sunshiny morning.

There yet lay upon Braeton plantation and the Lingold Wood the soft blue haze of early day, the sparkle of dew, and a delicate aërial mist that was creeping slowly down into the valley, leaving sweep after sweep of foliage clearly outlined upon the cloudless sky. There were tints of rose and pearl and grey upon the distant Downshire hills, fading as day grew stronger, but still very lovely. And all was so sweet, so fresh, so pure, no sadness upon anything within or without, as Maud sat there waiting for the rest to come in to breakfast; whiling away the time by mending one of Stephen Roden's gloves, ready to give him the next evening when he should call in on his way from the Marbrook station.

When she had finished she put her own little hand into it, and laughed her merry, pleasant, glad-hearted laugh, as she tried to fit her delicate taper fingers into the heavy markings that his great ones had made. What a strong, nervy hand it was that that glove belonged to! what an honest, white hand!—whiter far from all bribe or

action base than many a duke's. What a faithful hand to hold her up all along the rough road of life, and to clear away the thorns from her path, and to shield her from all danger! And then she laid her cheek down upon the glove, and smiled that pleasant smile again. Only a few more hours, and he would be back. She had kept his flowers fresh and sweet; the rosebud at the garden gate was pushing one little faint streak of crimson colour through its thick green leaves, just as he said it would. Stephen's rose, she had learned to call it. It should hang there until he came back to reach it for her, and then she would keep it always as a remembrance of that June morning.

Which last thing, indeed, she did.

It was strange how she longed for his coming back again. She had had a homeless sort of feeling for the last few days in thinking that he was so far away; that, if anything had befallen them, he could not come to her at once. Last night, praying as she always did for those who were near and dear to her, the thought of him came very closely, and with it this longing for his real,

77 true, comforting presence; and she prayed that they might never have to say good-bye to each other any more, but that wherever he went again, to hardship, or suffering, or enjoyment, she might go with him too — always his, always with him — that he might be her stay and solace everywhere, all their life through. And still, as she lay down to rest, this longing thought came again and again, shaping itself, even upon her dreams, into a prayer that they might never have to bid each other farewell any more.

“God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers.” So He did on this, and Maud remembered it long years afterwards.

“Any letters, Joan?” she said, as the little maid came in with the first instalment of breakfast in the shape of a basket of rosy strawberries.

“No, Miss; only this here paper for Master, that the boy’s brought from Marbrook. And, please, Miss, him and Miss Mabel has gone round by Glinton for a walk, and left word they wouldn’t be back while nine, so you must even have to wait for breakfast.”

“Very well, Joan, it does not signify. Here,

give me the paper, and see that Martin takes Lizzy Machin some hot coffee down." And then Maud unfolded the "Manchester Times," and began to read it, as doubtless many others did that same morning, until she came to the words, in great, black, pitiless, staring letters —

"Terrible accident on the North line; twenty lives lost."

Maud did not faint; she did not shriek and scream; she did not burst into a tornado of tears; nor chide with passionate bewailings the overmastering will which had parted between her and all of human love. She did not cry out wildly and fiercely against the hand that had torn from her so utterly and suddenly her one great possession; but all life and energy seemed to stagnate within her; all power either of suffering or understanding. A dim, vague unconsciousness gathered down upon her, through which neither hope, nor grief, nor dread could pierce. Slowly, mechanically, she arose, wrapped her cloak round her, and tied her hat; then, still holding the paper in her shivering hands, she went with

wandering steps, as one in a dream, through the garden, so bright and dewy, and fresh in its summer beauty; across the orchard, where Pet and Muffie came capering to meet her, and looked wistfully up into her face with their great brown eyes to ask for the customary caress; and over the low stile into Lingold-wood. Then through the green shaded aisles of overhanging boughs and leaves, until she came to the little brook that tinkled past the garden of Glinton Manor.

Maud's home that was to have been.

There it stood in that early June morning freshness; its grey, worn old gables clearly marked against the blue sky; the oriel window waiting for the noon sunlight to creep round upon it; the vases holding up their clusters of moss and fern along the terrace walk; the lilies idly swaying to and fro upon the fountain pond; the cypress stretching out its long black arms over the distance; the flowers — Stephen's flowers — shining out brave and bright. Still for scent, the sweet-briar wafting out its thrills of perfume; still for colour, the quaint old English beds of roses, pinks, and pansies; still for mo-

tion, the brook rippling along over its gravelly bed, and the yellow iris nodding on its tall green stem, and the long willow branches drifting across the stream, and the light fern leaves curling and uncurling their feathery fronds in the wind. Still for sound, the slow drip of the water, falling with measured plash from the marble urn, and the rooks cawing out their dreary, monotonous talk from the old elm tree, and the cool rustling of the ivy leaves round the carved-stone doorway. And through all, and mingling with all, and saddening all, the sharp, clear whistle of the railway train, cutting its way in and out through the valley; keen and ringing now, as it swung across the highroad, then broken and uncertain, as the sound lost itself among the Mossingay woods, and again starting out into the open country, and dying off into a faint sobbing sigh upon the distance.

The railway-whistle. Listened for eagerly by so many as the signal for loved friends to meet, but for her only a perpetual knell for the joy that she had lost — never anything more than that for her now.

Poor little Maud! poor little Maud! standing there by the brook-side in Lingold Wood, the worn gables of Glington Manor looking greyly down upon her, the garden's gay, bright beauty mocking and dazzling before her tearless eyes. Poor little Maud! still grasping in her starved white fingers that cruel Manchester paper, still straining her thoughts to pierce through that blinding haze which was gathering thicker and colder upon her as she stood.

And then she read it all over again — the hard, pitiless words, that would be read that morning by many a merchant at his desk, by many a clerk in his counting-house, by many an idler in his club room — pitiless words that would be gabbled over by news boys in the streets, and read out with hardly a passing sigh by comfortable matrons in their unscathed homes — well-chosen, neatly expressed, admirably concise words, but hard, pitiless words, that asked for so many readings ere they would reveal to her all their bitter import.

She understood it at last. Slowly, and as it

were awaking from some dim, shapeless dream, there rose before her the great, sad, unalterable fact, which no distance could ever soften, no time ever efface. Stephen Roden was dead.

Yes, God had speedily answered that unspoken prayer of hers ; for our very thoughts are prayers, as well as our words. She would never say good-bye to Stephen any more. Henceforth there would be no parting between them. Near her, very near her, perhaps much nearer than in life he had ever been, she might think of him now as an unseen presence of help and comfort and hope. Never more indeed to hold with him any speech of years on earth to come, or to walk hand-in-hand with him to meet whatever of mortal danger might lie before her, or to rest, weary and way-worn, upon his strong arm, as she once thought to do,—but not the less truly hers in all present and coming time ; chosen perhaps by his Father and her Father to be for her one of those ministering spirits who do always keep watch and guard over the children of the kingdom.

So there, beneath the leafy temple of Lingold

Wood, and within sight of the Glinton house, now hers no longer, Maud knelt; and through tears that no bravery could keep back, and through grief that must have way, she prayed. Not for him, she knew—blessed knowledge—that he was safely anchored where no prayers of hers could brighten his rest and glory—but for herself, that she might have strength for all trial, and patience for all waiting; the strong, true, loving heart, the willing right hand for all toil; for light to walk humbly and reverently through the rest of her lonely life, until in another and purer world God would give back all He had taken from her here.

And then for all who like her mourned over those who were not; that to them, as to her, the hope of future rest might spring and brighten; and that all sorrow, wherever sent, might yield its heaven-intended guerdon of purity and nobleness.

So praying, the bitterness of death passed away. Maud arose, sad, it is true, and chastened; for, with the memory of that morning upon her,

must she not always be so ? But no longer weary or despairing, as those who have no hope ; no longer girded in by the misty horizon of a half-realised dread, but able to look forth clearly and steadily unto the land that is very far off.

From that grassy altar, from that lonely place of prayer, Maud arose with the grand seal of suffering upon her brow, the high signet stamp of heaven upon her pale face, the holy cross of grief to consecrate her whole future life, and lift her, even through its pain, to a nobler, purer being.

And so home again through Lingold Wood. Treading all the way upon quivering bars and flashes of sunshine, which lay over the flowered and mossy ground ; beneath waving leaves and gushing song of birds ; among a leafy choir of voices which seemed to chant for her the anthem of this her new consecration ; through the orchard where Pet and Muffie came wistfully to her again ; she could give the mute, pleading creatures their morning caress now, and send them away in peace ; across the garden, bright with many-tinted flowers,

and under Stephen Roden's rose, which she reached down and gathered very reverently.

Home again, to meet as bravely as she could those sad, wistful faces, and sorrow-laden hearts, that would have given her sympathy if they dared. Home again, to gather up the precious relics of her departed life; to lay away the flower whose rosy colour was to have been the herald of his return — the glove she had just been mending for him — the little scraps of music he had copied for her — the books he had read to her. Home again, to live from day to day as purely and worthily as she might, a life upon which lay henceforth the dignity of a heaven-sent grief. Home again, to take up all her little duties; to be as she had ever been, the dutiful daughter, the kind sister, the faithful friend. Home again, to strive, and wait, and pray; to carry patiently and reverently that cross which in some form or other comes so surely to us all. And home again, to cheer herself in all weariness and solitude with those pleasant words of Stephen's — the last she had ever heard him speak —

“After all, Maud, it is only a little while.”

It was thus, through this burning baptism of tears, and afterwards across this kingly threshold of Hope, that Maud Harcourt passed from girlhood into womanhood.

CHAPTER III.

THAT day, — the day of Maud's first great grief, — passed solemnly over, and night came, bringing with it sleep, and, for awhile at least, merciful forgetfulness of all that had gone before it.

She was awakened next morning by the gay carolling of the birds in the jasmine branches; by a pleasant sound of whispering leaves, as the breeze came lightly dancing up through the orchard-trees, and by the merry glinting in of the sunshine through half-drawn white window-curtains upon the flowers — his flowers — which he had given her the night before he went away; and of which not a petal had curled or a leaf withered, because of that dew of friendship which rested always so lovingly upon them.

At first sight of them, there came over her a

bright flush of gladness and delight. "I shall see him to-day," she half murmured to herself, in her low, musical undertone; "he shall see how sweet and fresh I have kept them for him." And with that springing sense of coming joy, she raised herself and began to gather back the long tresses of her brown hair. But why were her eyes so hot and smarting — why did her head ache so — why were her lips so parched — how came that burning feel on her forehead, and that dizzy faintness when she tried to look around her? And what was the meaning of that white handkerchief, crushed up and pressed tight together, and wet even still with tears, that lay beside her pillow?

Then, upon the fresh, sunshiny morning stillness, a keen, sharp, glittering, sword-like sound was laid. It was the railway whistle, cutting up along the Marbrook valley; and as it plunged into the Braeton woods, breaking and hissing, and moaning with a wild, uncertain sob. Then Maud remembered it all.

Oh! that first waking up to life again, after grief has been laid to rest by sleep! that

dim, vague, haunting consciousness of something wrong, something that will not at first shape itself into reality, but flickers before us, ghost-like and uncertain, until we strain our eyes to look upon it, and then through the clouds and mists of half-departed dreams, it struggles out into fearful, agonising form ! Oh, the terrible re-appearing of the fact which we had hoped might be nothing more than a mere fancy, a vision of the night, to be cleared away by morning sunshine ; the spectral thing which we would so fain put away, but yet it stalks before us, and claims, day by day, to be taken up again and hugged to our hearts in all its icy, deadening coldness ; until at last we could almost wish to waken no more, if such waking must always bring with it this never-sleeping presence of our grief. Maud clasped her hands tight and fast together, and then turned wearily back upon her pillow, to gather strength to battle once more with the terrible reality of death.

Let no one think, who has been called to face the awful front of suffering, that one little hour of prayer, how earnest soever and heartfelt it may have been, how instinct with all faith and

humility, can ever wholly exorcise the past, or bar it from often and again rising upon us with a power and vividness which nothing but Almighty strength can enable us to bear. Let no one think that, having bowed in lowliest submission to the All-ruling Will, and laid away our treasures from our sight into the keeping of infinite love, to behold them again no more in this world, memory loses her prerogative, and the heart its power of suffering. Let them not think that any force of resignation or self-abnegation can entirely blot out a past which God intends should be ever before us, for chastening and purifying. Let them rather steady themselves to meet, day by day, the awful presence of their grief, and to walk silently, reverently—it may be for months, it may be for years, it may be for a lifetime—hand in hand with the angel of discipline, beneath that cloud, which elsewhere, if not here, shall surely descend upon them in a gentle, refreshing rain.

As it did upon Maud. As it will do upon all who wait patiently for it. For there is no consecration so noble as that of heaven-sent, heaven-

sustained sorrow; albeit we shrink ignorantly from its burning seal;—no rest so utter, so blessed as waits for those whom He has made perfect through suffering.

It is a merciful thing to have work to do—work for head, and heart, and hand—work that shall win thought for awhile from its saddened resting-place, and send it forth kind and careful for the weal of others. Maud had never had time to be idle, even when all life smiled in sunshine before her; still less now, when the sudden sweeping away of her earthly future had left a blank which nothing but action, earnest and healthful, could fill. She took Stephen's flowers carefully out of the glass in which she had arranged them only one little day before, and laid them away in her desk; and then prepared for her usual round of daily duties, the pattern of what her whole life must be now. Not much room for thought, that might come by-and-by. The only thing at present, next to prayer itself, was to act, and to act, and to act; for in action only could she find rest.

Perhaps, more than any ever think, it is so for

us all. Perhaps what we want for quiet and contentment is simply work to do; something that shall take us out of ourselves, setting us beyond the sphere of our little joys, and sorrows, and anxieties, out upon that great field of human life where so many wait for help and comfort; something which shall join the separate tones of our individual selves with those of others round us, and so make up the grand, full, sweet harmony of love, the veritable music of the spheres, which, like that sung of by the olden poets, does indeed often escape our mortal ears, simply because we are too selfish to listen or take our part in its harmony.

They brought Stephen Roden home to Braeton to bury him. Death had dealt very gently with him, not marring the rugged, manly form that was once so strong, or sweeping from the pale face one trait of its bravery and sweetness. Very quickly, very suddenly, with hardly room for one moment of fear or terror, he must have gone home; crossing, with a single step, that little stream over which most men weary with pain

and sickness, ere they gain sure footing on the other side.

They found, laid very near his heart, the Testament which he always carried with him, and folded within its leaves, just upon that verse in the Revelation, "There shall be no more death," one single little blue harebell, not dry yet from the dew which had gathered in its tiny cup. Both were given to Maud; two other beads for the rosary of memory. But she never knew, neither did any one else, how and when that flower was plucked, nor how very gently upon its blue loveliness the thought of her had been laid. Like many other things which we cherish reverently among our treasures, it was full of unspoken meaning, full of a story which no one, even she who loved it best, would ever read or think of.

He was laid with little Walter in Mr. Harcourt's vault; the great, stalwart, brave man, side by side with the unconscious child who had scarce gone a step in life's journey; alike safe, alike innocent, alike watched over by Him who will ever keep that which is committed to Him. And

the yew-tree that grew by the west window spread its arms over them both, and wrapped them, night by night, in its friendly shade.

After that Maud began to live her woman-life.

Long ago, when she was a very little girl, her Papa had taken her and Mabel to see an exhibition of dissolving views at Marlbrook. One of them she remembered well. It was a broad, bright, beautiful landscape, with blue hills girding in the distance; uplands, dotted with many-tinted woods, swayed their robes of greenery in the sunshine; a little rill danced across the foreground, with beautiful, rich plumy flag leaves fringing its banks, and golden lilies dappling its surface; while bright-coloured flowers shone from mossy dells, and over all bent the clear blue sky, flecked with white and fleecy clouds.

But even while the little child Maud held her father's hand, and laughed in gladness to see this pleasant picture, it began to quiver and tremble and dissolve. The richly-clothed uplands melted away, and pale clustered columns rose in their place. A tessellated pavement hardened over the bright flowery foreground. The blue sky changed

into a groined and traceried roof; rich stained windows, with massy arches of stonework, looked out one by one upon the purple distance, and through them the sunlight poured in upon altars and shrines for prayer. The landscape was gone, quite gone, and in its place the bewildered child looked upon a grand old cathedral of the mediæval time, with its long dim aisles and up-reaching columns, and mysterious lights, and carved roof, and storied windows.

Maud had never thought of it since, until now, in the first solemn hours of this woman-life of hers, it rose before her as a symbol of what her future must be. Already the landscape, with its laughing light and kindling sky, its dancing rill and springing flowers, through which, child-like, she roamed, had changed, and dimmed, and deepened; and looking around her, she seemed to be standing in a vast cathedral, with its holy light and solemn music, its shrines, and altars, and places for prayer. God help her to be thankful for its quiet, its utter, utter stillness and repose. God help her to be thankful that, in its one deep grave over which she knelt, there was no

sting, no remorse. God help her, that, learning at last to look upon it as holy ground, she might rest there peacefully, and even pleasantly ; not wanting sunlight through the storied windows of Hope, nor music from the grand, sweet, choiring voices of the future.

Maud never asked, though many others did ask, why this great trouble had come to her ; why so suddenly the brightness had been taken out of her life. Enough for her that God had sent it, who sends nothing unwisely. Yet, who shall blame her that sometimes, sadly and with great longing, she looked back upon the landscape of the past, and forward with somewhat of awe to the cathedral future ?

It is not easy to learn that God's purpose for us is ever from the less to the greater ; and that, when the dream of life is over, and the hand of the spoiler surely laid on whatever of earthly hope we had treasured up for ourselves, it is only that we may pass forward to that surer guerdon of rest which awaits us yonder. Once having left it, there is no return—none—to the

shore from which we sailed in all the fresh expectancy of early promise. But it is a precious thought, that if not for this little life of earth, at least for that other one of heaven, the best always lies *before* us. We leave in the past nothing that the future cannot far more than repay. Let no one say then, of any joy that has been lent, "It is vanished and returns not." It has only gone for a little while; travelling a few steps farther in our pilgrimage, we shall meet it again, fairer than ever we knew it before. It is through such shoals and quicksands and rocks as these that He bringeth us to rest at last.

And so trusting, Maud lived quietly and patiently on. Shaken suddenly from her nest of girlish hopes, she had been taught to spread her untried wings and mount to a purer air. Without trouble she would have been always very lovable, very gentle, very winning; with it she became — as thousands more do every day become, if only we knew it, and could honour them for it — the brave, noble-thoughted woman.

All glory to Him who so leads His children, by

a way they have not known, to the mountain top of perfect peace ! All honour to those who, shrinking not from the dark and rugged path, have left in it their footprints to guide us who tread it now with feebler steps !

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was great silence in the cottage at Mossingay. It had been there ever since the news came. Sally, awkward, blundering, left-handed, common-place Sally, seemed to feel that there was something very imposing in having had a death in the family; and having a dim, musty sort of notion that utter stillness was the highest possible tribute of respect she could pay to the memory of her master, she acted accordingly. She took off her pegged shoes, put them behind the copper in the back kitchen, and went about the house in her stocking feet. She shook her thick drugget apron menacingly in the cat's face if it ventured to mew, and uttered a long drawn whish-sh through her pursed-up lips if she happened to let the brush-

handle fall, or rattle the fire-irons. And when by chance an itinerant Euterpian devotee came round with a barrel organ, and took his stand in the back yard, Sally flew out at the door and whisked the mop in his face with an aspect of such determinate indignation that it arrested the performance at once, and sent the musician off the premises *à l'allegro*.

As for Martha Brant, as soon as she was satisfactorily convinced that her dear master was "took," she resigned herself to a subdued quietness, and sat by the kitchen fire in her best black gown and clean white cap, severely repelling Sally's whispered attempts at conversation. Sometimes, if in the utter stillness which reigned about the house a faint tapping sound was heard, or the old clock on the stairs gave a sudden creak, she would shut her eyes and repeat her Creed in quick, sharp undertone; and then throw her apron over her head, and refuse to give any answer to Sally's wide-open stare of mute astonishment.

And in the office, too, that room where Stephen Roden used to sit when the day's work was done,

and little. Maud came stealing into his thoughts, —in the old-fashioned, neatly-furnished office— all was very quiet too. Once only, since that terrible night when the news came, had anyone entered there, and that was when Martha took her shoes off and made a reverent curtsy at the threshold, and then went in and drew the blinds down, leaving everything else just as it was. The little statuette of Burns upon the mantel-piece, over it the portrait of Stephen's mother, and above that again the painting of the Far West Forest in its black oak frame. And the ordnance maps were lying on the table, with the half finished plan of the Mossingay estate beside them, and the compasses and rules, and plotting scale, just as he had left them a week ago. More than a year's labour spent upon that plan, yet it was never to be finished. And there too, standing near the window, was his easel with a sketch begun upon it, which anyone who knew the place would have recognised as the path through Braeton plantation; his palette was lying by it, with the brush and rest-stick all ready for use when he might

find time to put more touches into it. And in the recess at the left hand side of the fireplace was the old carved wood cabinet with the deep drawer where he kept his choicest belongings; some of his mother's favourite books, one or two tiny little notes—all that Mand had ever written to him—a watch-guard she had braided for him last winter, too sacred ever to be worn; and that spray of young sycamore, very faded now and shrivelled, which he had gathered long ago on the Braeton road, and carefully laid away beside these. But what right has anyone to look into that drawer? Who cannot picture well enough what might be there? Who that has lived through well nigh forty years of life has not gathered for himself some such remembrance of bygone thoughts and joys; whereupon, could other eyes than his own ever rest, they might see there depicted more accurately than any books, words or pictures could ever represent it, the man's own history, the man's own mind. Happy that man, whoever he may be, and howsoever thought of by his fellows, whose secret treasure-house of

facts and fancies, if suddenly rified when he is no more, should be found so pure and innocent and holy as Stephen Roden's drawer in the old cabinet at Mossingay Cottage.

"Eh! Sally, honey," said Martha, after a long, long pause of utter silence, "ye may tak' the poor dear master's coat off t' peg, an' hang it up onywhere's, just out o' sight; an' his slippers too, bless him! them buff leather 'uns as I put down t' fire to be airy an' dry agin he come home again. He'll never want 'em no more now, I'm thinkin'. Ay, wench, but its an onmerciful thing, it is, for a good Christian like him to be trampled out o' life i' that way, an' sich lots of folk left under one's feet as isn't good for nowt but to be swept to one side for rubbish;" and the old woman looked up the chimney and sighed.

"Nay, Granny, tak' heart on't," said Sally, who was generally of a cheerful disposition, and cultivated the grace of silence on the present occasion more from a sense of respectful duty than because she felt in any wise drawn thereunto; "things is never so bad but what

they might be worse, and my word on't, he's gone to t' right place if he's gone at all; but it ain't no sort o' ways clear to my mind but what it's all a lee; folks puts owt nowadays in them there papers. Why, it wasn't over a week sin' Jem Mallers tell'd me as how Queen Victory had sent word over to Ameriky, and got a answer back afore night. Now I say folks as could take that in 'ud believe *owt*; an' I wouldn't go for to say but what this is t' same sort o' thing."

"Out on ye, lassie; don't be maunderin' after such nonsense. I didn't get that there token night afore last for nothin'."

"What token, granny?" said Sally, in a mysterious whisper, resting her two fat red arms on the top of the sweeping brush, and looking hard in the old woman's face.

"Why, as I were wakkened up wi' rheumatiz, nigh upon t' strok' o' twelve, I heard a tappin', just for all t' world as clear like as poor dear master used to give at front door, an' I gits up an' looks out o' t' windy, and says 'Who's there?' an' it wern't nobody at all. So I laid

me down again, an' I hadn't fairly got straightened an' comfortable afore I heerd it again, just at bed head, an' I knew as how it were a token then for some one as was a goin' to be took; so I said my creed and went off again. I knew summut was a goin' to happen; tokens isn't sent for nothin'."

"Law! granny, but it would ha' sent me into fits; it kind o' skeers me awful to be hearin' o' noises at nights."

"Fits, wench! sich nonsense! why, some folks skriel out if a ratten scrats behind t' boards, but there's no call to be feared on a token if you nobbut say your 'postle's creed quick sharp after it, an' don't turn over on your back. I once heerd tell of a man as fenced off a token wi' sayin' his multiplication table, but that's what I call haythenish, and not fit for a dacent Christian to think on. But laws a massy! that's neither here nor there, now the dear master's gone. Nobbut to think as I should ha' known him from being a babby, to say nowt o' followin' his mother when she got married, and then gone 'long wi' him to that

Danlaggan place, among them barefooted servant lasses, an' me a decent-bred Englishwoman: besides allus puttin' in a word for him ivvery night i' my prayers, when he was off in yon furrin parts, an' then to heer tell on him bein' snuffed out on a sudden in sich an on-natural manner, with niver a body to speak a word tull him or ought. I wouldn't ha' cared so much if he'd died a-bed, wi' things clane an' dacent, an' somebody as would ha' brought him a nice bit an' sup when he could frame to tak' it, an' so as he could be laid out like a Christian when t' breath was fairly out on him; but it's a vast more nor an old woman like me can bide for him to be took in sich an ondacent way as yon," and Martha threw her apron over her head, and began to sob as she rocked herself to and fro in her chair.

"Whisht, Granny," said Sally, in a whisper, peering round behind the window blind to the back door. "Yon's Milly Dakin and her master comin' up t' road into t' yard."

"An' when should folks come to see one at all, if they don't come at sich like times as

these? Run, Sally, into t' larder, and fetch t' spice loaf out, an' fettle up t' hearth afore they come in, an' side off yon pots off o' t' table, and set down t' ale jug. Folks shan't say as how we can't frame to do things proper, when such a 'fliction as this here comes;" and Martha lowered her apron and smoothed her grey hair, and settled her cap, and sat a little more upright in her chair; for she felt, in common with all other bereaved heads of households, that there was a certain accession of dignity in being called upon by her acquaintances and condoled with on the great loss she had sustained. And as Milly Dakin and her stalwart husband came in, she rose to receive them with a grave serenity which would not have disgraced Lady Albyn herself.

The blacksmith was attired in his Sunday coat and a clean neckerchief, which his wife had just finished ironing out before they came. Milly had put on a bit of black ribbon by way of respect to Mrs. Brant's feelings. Just as they had got comfortably seated, old Matthew Benn came tottering in, in a vaguely apologetic

tical sort of way, accompanied by his more vigorous better half, who exercised a brisk supervision over him — took off his beaver hat and laid it on the dresser, got him settled down in a chair, then smoothed his coat for him, gave his hair, — what there was of it — a little set back, and touched him up in a general way; saying as she performed these wifely offices, that “old folks got ’mazing helpless, and for her part she couldn’t think what she’d ever got married for at all, for he wasn’t no sort o’ thing to look ’up to, and took a vast deal o’ mindin’ to help him along in the right track.”

“I allers said them trains was nasty things,” said Milly, taking out her white pocket-handkerchief to receive the cake which Sally was handing round to the company. She had modestly declined being assisted to ale, having a misty sort of notion that it wasn’t feminine.

“They’re all a invention frae beneath,” rejoined her spouse, whose trade had declined considerably since the advent of railroads about Braeton. “Whar ever herd o’ sich like awful things as these] here in t’ good old coachin’

times? I allus said harm would come on't when folks tried to go faster than their Maker meant 'em to; not but what I think there's plenty o' folks in t' warld as 'ud be all t' better for bein' shifted out on it, least ways t' warld 'ud be better, if t' folks wasn't themselves. But it's allus t' best kind as gets took; t' others hangs on as isn't no good to onybody."

"Well, it isn't no good frettin' as I can see," said Matthew Benn meditatively, from his arm-chair opposite Mrs. Brant. Polly always took care to get her husband a good seat out of the way of draughts, for he cost her so much trouble in colds. "We can't fetch him back nohow, an' he's gotten landed in a good place."

"No use frettin'!" responded his wife, to whose active, brisk temperament Matthew's meek submission was a perpetual worrit. "Who said it was? An' yet I'd like to know who fretted more nor yourself when our Jem was took — him as went off in faver last fall, ye mind, Mrs. Brant, — I've no manner of patience wi' folks as tells their neighbours not to fret, an' sings out like mad if ony o' their own bairns

is took from t' evil to come. I say as how Mr. Roden's a man as *ought* to be fretted for, an' it's many a wet eye there'll be for him in this parish," and Polly shook out her pocket-handkerchief full of crumbs into the fire-place, and took a fresh piece of cake.

"Ay, he was a right 'un, he was," said Milly, "Why, the times I've see'd him take and lift our Willy over yon great mud puddle just afore t' school-house door, when it was ever big for t' poor bairn to stride across, wi'out gettin' up to shoe-tops i' watter; an' I've heerd of his goin' to read to old Machin, an' sendin' his servant to help her with her bit o' work, an' I say a man as 'll do the like o' that has a power o' good in t' heart on him, an' ought to be fretted over right well. An' t' poor young leddy, Miss Maud, her as he were goin' to be wed to —an' a bonnier he couldn't ha' found,—oh, but she'll be sore hurt, the darling, an' it's many a soul ought to pray for her whiles."

"Pray for her!" said Polly, with an indignant swing of her portly shoulders, "pray for her, the jewel! an' its precious little some folks

prays for them as gets the trouble sent. Why, it was nobbut last night as I was a bilin' some peas for supper, in come Miss Tim, yon old maid, ye mind, from Marbrook, and says she to me, 'Mrs. Benn,' says she, 'you've been having a shocking warning in this parish.'

"'Yes, Miss,' I says, an' puts another stalk o' mint in among t' peas, and I didn't say nowt else, for I couldn't think o' nothin' to say.

"'It'll be a great visitation for Miss Maud,' she says, as hard and cold like as a raw potaty.

"'Yes, Miss,' says I again, 'an' it seems to me as if there's many a one deserved it more nor she did, the jewel.'

"Well, then she kind o' drew herself up like, an' looked as big as you please. I'm thinking she doesn't like me to call her *Miss*, seein' as she's getting ould, but I don't mean ever to call her ought else, for she ain't married, no wonder either, and hasn't got no right to be called like them as is.

"And then she says, says she, 'It's a pro-

vidence upon her for not givin' up herself a bit more to the work o' the church. She never made herself useful with bazaars or aught o' that sort, and lived over much to herself.' Just think o' the like o' that now! an' that dear young lady wearin' and slavin' of herself from year end to year end, comin' to see us, an' helping of us on, and talkin' so kind and precious like to us. I couldn't bear it, it kind o' riled me up, an' I'd got t' pot lid i' my hand.'"

Here Sally opened her round eyes, and listened with breathless interest, while Polly flourished her hands about and jerked her head until the ribbons on her bonnet danced again.

"I'd got t' pot lid i' my hand, an' I could ha' throwed it at her, I just could, if it hadn't been for a pleeceman about on t' other side o' t' road; but I telled her a bit o' my mind, I did. 'Miss Tim,' says I, 'ye're an evil-minded woman, ye are, to go for to blacken that dear precious young leddy, whose ould shoes ye aren't good enough to wear; that *bonnie* young leddy,' and here Polly's voice melted into a rich counter-tenor, "'that goes in an' out among the

folks like an angel of marcy, an' never sets foot onywhere but she puts a drop o' sunshine into t' day's work wi' her bonnie smile and her sweet tender ways; an' now that the trouble's on her, an' she can't lift her blessed head, the darlin', ye come croakin' round and pickin' of her, 'cause she doesn't dress herself up and stand at bazaars, an' work her fingers to t' bone in sewin' at things as poor folks ought to be hired to do.

"Then says she to me, 'Mrs. Benn,' says she, as greasy like and shining, 'you're *heated*—you ain't a thinkin' o' what you're sayin'.

"Well, for t' matter o' that, I *was* heated, for I'd been washin' all day, an' I'd t' sheets to wring out myself, for Matthy yonder wi' his paral'sis, an' his shortness o' breath, an' his rhumatiz, ain't no more good at wringing out a sheet than a month-old babby. An' then I'd been a ironing of some starch things in that bit of a back kitchen of ours, nigh hand a fire hot enough to broil every bit o' patience out o' me, an' if all that isn't enough to *heat* a body I'd like to know what is. So says I to her, 'Miss Tim,' says I, 'it's

my opinion you've been heating yourself with something worse nor honest work, afore you'd come to other folk's houses, making sich ondamment remarks about our dear precious young leddy, an' its an onmannerly thing, too, for the likes o' you to do, as hasn't given a bite nor a sup to anybody in this parish as I knows on,—an' she hasn't neither, Mrs. Brant, for she's as big a screw as you ever set eyes on—'to be after takin' the shine out of her as has allus been t' pride an' blessin' o' t' place.'

"Well, Mrs. Brant, wi' that she took and flung herself out o' t' door, without ever so much as sayin' good mornin' to ye, an' was off down t' lane like a shot, and she said summut about pleecemen, and bein' consulted in her manevolent bedevours, or some such grand words, as I couldn't understand and wasn't goin' to try. I haven't common patience wi' sich like folks," and Polly's bonnet-ribbons flew about with renewed velocity, and she jerked out a fresh residue of crumbs into the fireplace.

"Polly, honey then, be a bit aisy now, can't ye?" said Matthew soothingly—"it's onseemly to

be givin' out agin' quality in sich a way; least said's soonest mended, honey."

"Onseemly! was ye sayin', an' I'd like to know if it ain't kind o' unseemly for the like's of her to let on i' that way over Miss Maud? Ye may cringe to yer betters if ye like, but as long as I've got a tongue i' my head, I'll stick up for the dear young leddy. And as for callin' sich like folks as *her*, quality, I'd just shut up all t' rest o' my life, afore I'd demean myself to do ony sich thing—ould maids as comes into other folk's houses an' blackens their neighbours' characters, an' takes pot-lid off to fin' out what yer goin' to have for yer dinner, an' pries round among t' cupboards, an' closets, an' places, a ferretin' out things as isn't no concern o' theirs, an' tellin' of ye to yer face as yer ain't good tempered enough, an' askin' if yer husband drinks, an' if yer childer goes to t' school, an' if yer get parish pay, an' if yer have t' clergyman come to see ye; and tellin' ye to keep yerself clean and tidy—I'd like to see *her* keep herself clean an' tidy in that bit of a back kitchen of mine, wi' a week's wash to clear out o' t' way, an' t'

chimney reeking fit to smother ye, and an ould man like you to shake up whiles an' fix right and do for—sich talk! just as if you wouldn't do it if you could, without their takin' trouble to tell ye. An' then when they've gotten ivvery thing they want out on ye, an' spried round into all yer ways an' doin's, and yer just beginnin' to think as how they're goin' to give ye a bit o' summut solider nor advice, they wish ye a good morning, an' yer forced to drop a curtsey an' thank em—ugh! to call sich folks as them quality, catch me doin' ought o' t' sort. But, Matthy, we mun be setting off back, for I left bread in t' oven afore I came out, an' it 'll be as brown as yon stick o' yours afore I get to give it a turn. Good evening to ye, Mrs. Brant, an' I hope ye'll get safe landed t'other side o' yer trouble, and Miss Maud too, bless her!"

Polly Benn then proceeded to shake Matthew up. She smoothed his hair back, and fixed his hat on with a vigorous slap, set his coat straight, and whisked off the crumbs that had fallen upon it; then after giving an eye

round him to see that all was right, she fetched his stick and steered him safely through the kitchen, and across the back yard, and into Braeton lane, where she took him in tow, and swept him safely along home. Milly Dakin stayed a little while after, to make a few general remarks about its being unwomanly in her opinion to have so much talk; and then gently reminding her sturdy Vulcan that it was drawing on to supper, he gathered himself up, and they wished Mrs. Brant good-night, leaving the great kitchen looking dark and empty and deserted; the pan lids and dish covers gleaming white and ghost-like in the twilight, and a desolate eerie sort of silence creeping amongst the shadows, which made Martha throw her apron over her head again and begin to sigh vehemently.

“And now then, wench,” she said to Sally after a pause, in which there was nothing to be heard but the ticking of the old clock on the stairs, and a crackling of cinders, as one by one they fell out of the dead fire, “now then, clear away that seed loaf, and side them mugs an’ things off t’ table, an’ give it a dust down. I’m thankful I ain’t a

fine leddy to have folks comin' round ivvery night, an' talkin' all t' wits out on me. An' then fetch big ould Bible out o' t' best parlour, an' we'll frame to spell out a chapter whiles; an' then I'll put up t' best sort o' prayer I can. Eh, wench, but it's a sorry like thing when t' head o' a family's took, an' poor onlarned things left to fend for theirselves, an' fin' out t' road to heaven best way they can.

"What!" she said, seeing that Sally was expertly reducing the circumference of the seed loaf for her own private benefit, and stowing away large portions of it, besides taking surreptitious draughts from the brown jug, "mun ye need be stuffin' yerself wi' cake an' ale, an' yer master, bless him, him as took ye out o' t' parish, and gived ye a good home sin' ye was a bairn, not fixed in his grave? Can't ye be doin' as yer bid, and then sittin' decently on yer chair, and gatherin' yerself into a serious frame o' mind?"

"Sure, granny, I'se serious enough whiles," said Sally, proceeding to wrap up the loaf in a clean cloth, "I'se allus thinkin' as how there's sperrits about, an' as for sittin' on t'other chair

yonder, wi' t' apron over my head, I'm thinkin' folks as came in 'ud be skeered at us, an' I don't see neither how t' floors 'ud get right swept and pans cleaned; folks *must* live."

To which proposition, Martha, not being able to oppose a satisfactory answer, contented herself by replying, "That's neither here nor there, hould yer tongue, bairn, and learn to behave yer-self. Marry, but I'm thinkin' if half on't world got shotten dead wi' a railway train, t'other half 'ud go on eatin' cake an' ale as if nowt were t' matter."

CHAPTER V.

Bracton, June 29th.—Maud, Maud! my poor little sister Maud! what shall I say to you?—

“With silence only as their benediction,
God’s angels come;
Where, in the shadow of a great affliction,
The soul sits dumb:”

and how should I speak when they are still? We did not think it would be in this way, did we, Maud, when you and I had that walk in the April woods? My poor little sister! my gentle little sister! whose life was to have been so bright, so full of peace. *Was to have been!* Quiet eyes, that I once thought had never known the feel of tears; quiet heart, that had never beat with anything but content; quiet hands, that used to fold each other in such perfect

repose,—all never to be quiet any more now. Maud, my sister Maud, is there, then, nothing but sorrow in this world? Did you not tell me, long ago, that there remaineth even here a “rest” for the people of God? Oh! that we could find it, Maud!

Sometimes I think she *has* found it. She is so silent, so calm; with the silence and the calmness of one who has no more to hope for or fear for on earth, who will never again be what the world calls happy. It is so sad to watch her; she goes about her little household ways as patiently as ever, with no tear dropping from her eyes, and no sign of anguish on her forehead. And yet she is changed. She was once our pet, our darling; now, she is our saint, and we look up to her as to one whose life is far above ours, who does but walk among us for a little while, with no touch of earth upon her white garments, until He shall say to her, “Come up higher,” and she shall be with Him for ever. And with Stephen Roden, too, if indeed one who loved her so well is not always with her even now, a presence of rest and comfort.

I think, more and more, that the foundation of all true nobleness is suffering; that here, as in that other and more exalted state, it is only through the grave and gate of death that we pass to our joyful resurrection. Never before did I know how worthy and how enriching grief is, how it awakens our highest faculties, and places us in closer sympathy with Him who, though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And through these great and heavy surges, Maud, you have struggled to a new, nobler life. Perhaps, ere long, through those that dash over me, I too shall follow you.

We have been to the Lingold Lake again. How is it that that little wooden bridge, and the quiet stream that flickers under it, are so fast bound with my solemnest memories; that even now I think of every moment passed there, sadly, and with a reverent awe? How very beautiful it looked last week in its June dress of sparkling greenery! How the sunlight danced, and gleamed, and rippled on the broad lake! how the leaves, close folded up last time Maud and I

were there, now shook out their light tresses in the wind, and how the many-tinted, sweet-scented flowers smiled at us from their ferny beds! Summer had come in all its beauty, but there was no summer for us two. I was so glad the trees had grown thick and green between us and the grey gables of Glinton Manor, the home that was to have been Maud's. She has never seen it since that fatal day. Blessed leaves that grow up between us and our sorrows, giving us cool shade in place of stinging memories!

How different Maud is from me; how much nobler! In my first great grief I put away all comfort, and folded it tightly to my heart. There was no beauty to me then in the autumn leaves, or the purpling sky, or the thousand tints and forms of nature around me. Everything was darkened and shadowed by that one great, overhanging thought. She is so different; so meek, so patient, so willing to be comforted. Her eyes see love and beauty yet, where mine find nothing but gloom. How she lingered to admire the mossy sprays that carpeted the wood, and to look into the flowers' bright eyes, until her

own were gladdened; and how tenderly she removed some dead old year's leaves—perhaps the very leaves that fell on Philip Lowe and me last autumn—which were hiding the sunlight from a little white windflower! My kind sister Maud!

By and by, when we had walked up and down many a time through those thick, green, leafy aisles, we sat to rest upon an old trunk, just where we could see the Mar brook sparkling past the tall ferns, and watch the silver sheen of the lake beyond. And there she spoke to me, in her quiet, simple way, of the great grief which had come upon her.

“Mabel,” she said, “I would not have him come back again. Do you know the last words he said to me were — ‘It is only a little while, Maud, and I shall see you again — only a little while.’ And it *is* only a little while; I shall see him again, Mabel, before long, I know I shall.”

Ah! how calmly we can talk of any grief that has no sin in it! I looked at her as she sat there, with such a heavenly peace throned on her forehead, and such an upward, waiting look in her eyes — eyes with less of earth in them than

heaven — and a strange fear shot through me. Was it indeed to be so? Was she too going to leave me? And I held her tightly as we sat there, more tightly than I had ever done in all my life before. And I said, “Maud, Maud, you must not go. Stay and comfort me, for I too have known sorrow; it has come to me, Maud, it has indeed.”

And then I told her all.

She spoke no word for long. Only she looked at me with those quiet eyes of hers, so full of sorrow, so full of love! When I come to die, I hope such a look as that may be the last I shall meet. I would like my last earthly memory to be of a face like Maud's, that, having its reflection on my spirit, I might pass to that other world where they are all like her. But when I told her of the peace which had come down upon me after that bitter strife — of the rest which grew with the thought that God had sent it all — she drew closer up to me, and said in her quiet undertone, —

"So He bringeth them to the haven where they would be."

I have that scene before me now. I shall never forget it, never. The summer air rippling up the wood with a wave-like whispering sound; the slant rays of sunlight quivering down to the grass at our feet; the glade leading up to Glington Manor streaked with soft, cool shadows, and opening here and there to let in the faint blue outline of the distant hills; the heavy pine and cedar branches stretching out sharp and black like groined arches upon the green roof of leaves above us; the bright coral-like red stems of the young sycamores gleaming in the sunshine; the flowers, many tinted, many scented, holding the light, lovingly within their waving bells; the musical, soft chime of the little Mar brook, as it flickered through the copse and fern; the cool *swish* of the wind through the fir trees; the lulling murmur of the wood pigeons; the soft rocking motion of the great bracken leaves; the glitter of the sunshine on the blades of grass; the blue sky glinting in through interlacing boughs; the soft haze of summer air upon the distance:—

and, over all, Maud's voice saying, what was blessed truth for us both, "*Then are they glad, because they be quiet.*"

For there was no sting now in either of our hearts. We felt, as we came home hand in hand through Lingold Wood that day, that the bitterness of death was past. We knew that if, for both of us, the brightest happiness of life lay behind, as indeed it did, so also did its keenest sorrow; and that all coming years, whether they brought with them light or shadow, would only be leading us on with gentle hand to our home, to that great solemn future of heaven, which we had both learned to think of now as the goal of all our hopes, the true rest and Sabbath of the soul.

I have found that it is great gain when we can look upon all earthly happiness as apart from ourselves, as not in itself necessary to our peace; when we can give thanks for those who are rejoicing in hope, yet envy not their joy; and when, being gentle through suffering ourselves, we can touch all other sorrow with a gentler hand. And come what may, life will always be

very holy—nay, even very sweet—so long as I have Maud, my sister Maud, to share it with me.

As we came home again through the orchard, the sharp ring of the railway whistle cut across the air. I was pained for her, and would have led her quickly away, but she only smiled and said, "Never mind, Mabel; it is always good to remember those we love when we know they are at rest."

And so it is. And I will think of you, Philip Lowe, my only one, as at rest too. After all, it will only be a little while, perhaps only a very little while, and we shall all be at rest together.

Sunday evening. — Everything is very quiet now, both for her and for me. She has given me precious words of comfort, and I know they shone into her own heart too as she spoke them. Ah, these seed-thoughts take root so soon in the warm fresh ground of grief. We are very near and dear to each other now, are we not, Maud?—nearer than we were before, since we have known each other's sorrows. And in all of them, we feel a strange, quiet sort of rest.

Is this the "rest" that remaineth for the people of God, Maud? I think it is, and He has given it to me, even to me.

That same afternoon Miss Nunly came to tea. She often comes now. She and Maud seem so thoroughly one. I know they like to talk by themselves, so I set out for another walk. First of all I called to see Lizzie Machin, and read to her; then I went to see poor, delicate Mrs. Hart, our curate's wife, and offered to take her two little children out while she got rest and quiet. I am beginning now to learn that we should not wait for high days and holidays to give our thank-offerings, but mark every day, be it glad or sorrowful, by some little act of kindness. I took them up to the copse on the hill behind our house, and while they went wandering about, rasp-hunting, I sat down under the trees, with the Marbrook valley before me sleeping in the evening sunshine, and the blue hills girding in the distance; and thought on all the changes which the last few months had brought.

It seemed as if there were not many bright

spots for the eye to rest upon; and when I looked forward to the future which we should have to go through day by day, it appeared to my sad fancy something like that road, that long, straight, even Glinton Road, that cut through the meadows on my right hand, over which Maud and I had so often gone when we were children on our way to school. A life-path now, somewhat dull and narrow it is true, but plainly defined. No wayside wanderings nor shady resting-places, but just a steady pursuit of the beaten track, one trodden by many before, without shadow to cross it or sunlight to rest upon it. Still, for both of us, for Maud and for me, it is the right path, one by which we are being led forth to a city of habitation. And, after all,

“Earth's guerdon of regret”

is almost the best that any happiness here leaves behind it.

CHAPTER VI.

Braeton, August 2nd.—Once more I am sitting here in my little room, with the sunlight glinting in through the jasmine leaves, making their shadows fall, soft and flickering, on my paper as I write. And far away yonder over the Downshire hills, the white clouds stoop and tremble; and thousands of leafy voices come to me from the Lingold Wood, no longer full of sad memories or dreary thoughts, but speaking pleasantly of golden days to come, for me, even me.

I said when the leaves came out last April, "There is no spring for me." I watched them bursting into greenness and beauty, and wearied that for me such freshness was all past;—little thinking, ere those same leaves had crimsoned, and paled, and fallen, what joy should come. He

is my own now, my very own, mine for ever. But how shall I tell it all? Sitting here at my little white-curtained window, all within and all without so warm and loving—where shall I begin? For, even before I can get a single page written, there comes down upon me the sweet consciousness of all that is, of all that will be, and I lose myself in dreams so bright and sunny.

Yes, it has come to me at last, that golden morning time, without which all life is dreary; but having it, or even the memory of it, we go forth strong and brave for all that may come after. Let me try once more to write it.

It was Wednesday, the day before yesterday. I had taken her class for her, her class of girls that she goes and teaches at Milly Dakin's before the evening service. I often take it for her now, for Maud is not strong, and a little thing wearies her. I remember the time when it would have been such a dismal, dreary thing for me to have gone and taught those girls; when I wondered how my sister, with no other motive than that of duty, could plod on with them so patiently week after week and month after month. I have learned to

understand it better now, and I can be tender with them, remembering that perhaps some of them too may have had trouble, even as we have. Nay, indeed, I know it is so. Poor Mary Dale has never been the same girl since that week the soldiers came recruiting through Braeton, and wiled away that simple John, the carpenter's lad; and when she hears anything about war now, she looks so keen and earnest, and she comes down to us sometimes to beg the newspapers and see if there has been any news from India. Poor Mary, I will go and talk to her some day, and try to comfort her. When the class was over, I went to see old Lizzy Machin and read to her. I generally have my own little testament when I go there, but this Wednesday evening I had left it at home, so the old woman gave me her great brown leather-covered bible. It opened at that chapter in Isaiah about the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose; the same it opened upon so many months ago, that morning when Philip was coming to see us. I read the chapter through, with a heart full of many thoughts, thoughts that she, in her quiet, monotonous life, knew nothing of.

And then I left her to go to church. It wanted more than a quarter of an hour to the service, but the perfect hush and stillness of the place seemed all I needed just then; so I went in.

I could not help thinking, as I crossed the threshold, leaving the glowing sunshine, the waving chestnuts, the blue sky, behind me, and entered the cool, dark, shadowed aisle that led to our pew under the west window, of that other and higher change through which our spirits, Maud's and mine, had passed,—from the brightness and fervour of early hope to the still, calm, even rest of faith, the utter ceasing from our own works, our own longings, our own aims, the simple waiting for Him,—the rest that remaineth for His people. And as I sat there, watching the light come in through the stained windows, casting the flickering shadow of the old yew tree, the tree that shelters Walter's and Stephen's grave, on the column before me; and as I listened, half sleeping, half waking, to the monotonous sound of the bells which had just begun to chime, there seemed to come before me, in a sort of dream, the whole of that past year with its joy and sorrow,

its tumult and rest. Once more, and for the last time, I bent over the grave of my bygone life, and read the inscriptions written there as one hope after another had died and been buried. Strangely mingling with the stained windows, and clustered columns, and groined roof of the old church, in that dim hazy light, there came up again long reaches of cliffs stretching their white arms to the sea; a pleasant murmur of blue waves plashing on the shore; salt spray flinging up high and bright over the dark rocks; drooping tresses of many-coloured weed drifting to and fro. Back again, too, came the autumn woods where crimson leaves lay thick upon Lingold Lake, and the golden sunset shone upon us for the last time. And then, like a swiftly rushing tide, separating me from all that had gone before, I remembered my first sorrow—the death of my one great hope, followed by Maud's, whose shadow lay upon us even then.

Thinking of all these things, I did not notice that the church had filled with people, and the bells ceased to chime. By and by the organ prelude began, part of that Twelfth Mass of Mozart's

that he used to be so fond of. I found the place in my prayer-book, and rose, my eyes still bent down, and my heart still going out after those long-ago times, when suddenly a quick, bright, thrill leaped through me. I looked up for one little moment, and then down again to look up no more. It was no well-accustomed voice, such as we had listened to for years and years back, that read out the beautiful opening exhortation ; it was no white-haired pastor's head that the sunlight gleamed upon, no bending time-worn form that stood within our old oak reading-desk.

It was Mr. Lowe, — Philip, my Philip.

God forgive me, that all through that blessed service my thoughts were far away from any spoken words. God forgive me, that in far other language than our holy church teaches, I praised Him for that day's life,—that while others prayed for protection, guidance, and pardon, I could but weep with a feeling there is no name for. God forgive me, that, overpassing the sense of all he said, I only knew it was far above any other joy to hear him speak again. I don't know

if he saw me or not. I never thought of that. To know that he was there was quite enough; his very presence was rest. O blessed time! O blessed sunshine! O blessed service of peace and thanksgiving!

The sermon seemed very soon over. I came out with the rest of the people, and home by myself through the Braeton plantation. As I walked slowly along, it seemed to me as if it might all have been a dream—just a blessed heaven-sent dream, to strengthen me for daily labour and patience, and to keep the memory of him fresh and pure in my heart. When I got home all was quiet as usual. Maud had not yet come back from the Lingold Wood, where she had gone early in the afternoon. Papa and mamma were having their evening reading in the dining-room, and asked me to join them, but I only wanted my own thoughts then; so I went into the drawing-room, and sat down on my low stool within the shadow of the curtains, looking out upon the garden and the meadows beyond.

I don't know how long I sat there—it must have been a very long time, though, for the streaks

she had looked upon. I could almost have fancied that, in the long solitary ramble from which she had just returned, he had met her and talked with her as in days of old. She sat down beside me in Philip's place. There was no need to tell her anything; she knew it all.

"I am very glad for you, Mabel."

That was all she said, and kissed me. Her lips were warm and glowing, and there was a flush, the old flush come back again, upon her cheek.

I could but think of that other Wednesday evening, little more than a year ago, when I had sat beside her at her bedroom window; not daring to tell her what was in my heart, and feeling as if her new-found joy had placed a great gulf between us. O Maud, why has it been taken away from you so soon?

It was no time for words. We could only sit there and think: I, with strange, reverent gladness, over my present; she, with patience, over her past. No, not her past, though, for there was that in her face, as I saw it then in the deepening twilight, which no memory could bring there; it was rather the calm, grand

certainty of coming joy, the upward waiting look of one whose future is all in heaven. Very soon he came back again to us, and stood beside me and Maud. 'Not between us, as Stephen Roden once did, hiding us from each other; but at my right hand.' They were both mine now, Maud and Philip, but I belonged to him only.

It was getting very late; but yet the twilight, as though loth to leave entirely a day which had been so fair, lingered softly, in broad, grey tints, upon the sky and the distant hills, and let us see in faint outline the massy sweeps of Braeton Plantation and the Lingold Wood. Standing there, we three together, in that entire quietness, I thought over again in one long, loving prayer my whole past life. Not wearily and wistfully, as in church awhile ago, standing over its graves and tear-worn relics, with a heart whose only inheritance was patient endurance; but as one may listen to very sweet and precious music, while some master hand brings out the hidden melody which underlies all its contending chords; or, as in the broad light of morning

one might stand on the lofty mountain-top, looking away upon sunlit valleys and flowery paths, and murmuring streams, over which, through all the dark and cloudy night, we had been painfully toiling, seeing no beauty, and only longing for rest; or, as after long working through some difficult problem, its solution dawns upon us, and we see how all has been tending onwards to harmony and correctness. So now, my life problem had been solved; so now, daylight shone on the long, weary journey of the past, and showed me how full of beauty, how full of wisdom it had been; so now, the master-hand had come and revealed the hidden melody which had been working on through all the jarring notes of life. So now, my dead hope had arisen, and there was no longer any grave for me to watch by.

And then in the half darkness I looked up at Philip's face. I could but just see it, and mark how upon its brave, iron-strong firmness there had come down a new tenderness; how its grand lines of decision and self-control were tempered with a most gentle kindliness; how

standing there beside me in that stately, regal manhood of his, with that princely pride of port and gesture, I could yet find that in him which for me would always be most tender and true; that, facing the world, as he did often, with a cold, stern, Alpine ridge of snow, there would always for me be sunshiny rifts, warm and pleasant, where the beautiful home flowers of love and peace would grow; and where, how rugged soever for passing travellers they might seem, I should always find shelter and rest. Philip, my king, my only one!

It was very, very still, so still that when the ten o'clock railway whistle sounded clear and long upon the Marbrook line, it made us start as if from some dream. Poor Maud! how often she had to hear that sound which had once told of his coming, but could now never speak to her of anything but heavy, life-long sadness. Her hand that I held in mine shook a little, just a very little; but when I turned and looked at her face, as I could see it in that dim uncertain twilight, there was still the same great calm upon her forehead, and the same warm flush

upon her cheek, and a glorious hopefulness in her eyes ; as if the soul within, overpassing all that lay before her of sorrow and waiting and longing, had rested on that future of perfect love,—that other, and blessed, and far-off land, from which the former things have passed away.

And then I remembered, what through these hours of quick upspringing joy, I had too selfishly forgotten —

This was to have been Maud's wedding-day.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the time of the Marbrook October races.

People always noticed that Miss Nunly was quieter than usual at such times as these, and seemed to have a weight upon her mind until they were over; as indeed most thinking people have, though not from the same cause perhaps. And when, as night drew on, and the crowded course disgorged its hundreds of populace into the quiet little streets, filling them with low revelry and drunken merriment—there came a look of great sadness and anxiety upon her face, and she would often remain for hours in her own room; some thought, to pray for the multitudes who were thus running to do evil; others, for those poor weary wives and mothers who had no heart to pray for themselves.

Marbrook was passing gay to-night, for the great race ball was being held, to which the rank and beauty of the whole county came, resplendent in plumes and diamonds, together with a shoal of lesser lights, younger sons of the aristocracy, and stiff old spinsters who lived very upright on their family pride and a small annuity. Carriages were flashing hither and thither along the streets, carriages of all shapes and pretensions; from the Duke of Chartermayne's crested equipage, into which had any one looked with sufficient impertinence, he might have caught a glimpse of ancestral jewels glittering in the lamplight, and a warm glow of crimson opera cloaks—down to the ancient black-hooded vehicle which conveyed the two Misses Farbelook, in sober coloured array, to this their annual episode of gaiety. For these most unexceptionable virgins, though daughters of the late esteemed Rector, and though having promised at an early period of their lives, in common with most other ball-goers, to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, were by no means averse to a spice of mundane vanity; and did not consider their

weekly ministrations in the tract district, No. 10 Braeton parish, in any way hindered' by a few preparatory quadrilles. Sir Everard Albyn, Lord of the Manor of Braeton, was there too, with his three fair daughters, floating masses of white drapery, picked out with jasmine and blush roses from the head milliner. And Mr. Euston Kaye talked pretty sentiment in the intervals of waltzes and polkas, or looked his sweetest smiles over glasses of strawberry cream in the supper-room. And old dowagers, with hearts as flinty as the diamonds which sparkled in their false ringlets, paraded magnificently up and down, keeping a sharp look-out over the prospects of marriageable daughters. And beautiful young mothers were there, dancing away beneath gaslight and artificial flowers, while at home their innocent children pined and wearied in the care of hirelings. And proud women stepped queen-like through quadrilles, and smoothed the care-marks from their high marble foreheads, and wreathed their rosy lips into stateliest smiles; wondering all the while what luck their husbands were having at the gaming-table, or whether the bet then

pending for the next day's race would leave them penniless. And gentlemen in white kids, with anxious hearts, whispered soft nonsense to the pyramids of tulle and tarltane at their sides, and then asked themselves by how many thousands they should be richer or poorer to-morrow night at this time.

Whilst fashionable life seethed and bubbled, and sparkled and sighed, and danced beneath the painted roof and among the evergreen garlands of Marbrook Assembly Rooms, another sort of life, totally another sort, was going on outside. There were alleys, even in snug, well conducted, respectable little Marbrook, down which the better sort of people never passed, and of which they rarely spoke; and these were thronged. There were rooms where dice rattled, and pale-faced, haggard-looking men bartered and sold, and paid away fortune, and character, and fair fame. And these were thronged. There were other rooms, all foul with smoke and brandy, where horrid jests went round and careless oaths; where men learned to despise their Master, and to lose faith in one another. And these were

thronged. For Marbrook was always very full at the races.

And anxious mothers watched the many-coloured ribbons of the recruiting sergeant flutter past, and wondered where those wild sons of theirs were, and whether they would come home again that night, or never any more at all. And other mothers, who had daughters out in service, thought wearily of them, and wished the race safely over, not without need. And wives, whose husbands had been out all day, sat drearily enough over desolate grates that had once been pleasant firesides, and listened to the Abbey clock striking hour after hour far into the night. And on the whole, there was more of wretchedness than joy, more of bitter heart-sorrow than anything else in Marbrook on the night of the grand October races. As perhaps there is everywhere on most race days.

But all was very quiet in the parlour of the old house in the Abbey Close, in which Miss Nunly and Maud sat; that quaint little wainscoted parlour, with its carved door opening out upon the old-fashioned garden, where the elm trees

reached out their dark branches, and the rooks cawed from morning to night, and the quiet, unbroken ripple of the silver Mar flowed past. Beyond them lay the uplands and moorlands, the same that Stephen Roden and Maud had trodden so often in the green beauty of spring. Not green now though, but just beginning to blush and crimson under the warm glances of October sunshine. And the tall poplars by the river side already shed their yellow leaves, and the belt of sycamores that skirted Mossingay Park put off their robe of summer beauty, as though weary of so many garish months of sunlight, and longing for the utter rest of winter. For even trees and flowers tire, as we do, of overmuch brightness.

Maud was somewhat changed, perhaps very much changed, since that May evening when the sight of her little figure tripping along the Marbrook road had sent Stephen Roden home with such a strange feeling at his heart. Changed, not so much in form and feature, or indeed in anything that mere surface observers could detect; for over and over again, common-place people had remarked how cheerfully Miss Maud got over

her disappointment, and would-be sentimental young ladies wondered that she did not appear suitably melancholy;—but changed, as those who knew her best could see full well, from the free-hearted, happy girl, floating serenely on over the quiet current of life, into the chastened, earnest, deeply thinking woman.

Only twenty-one; she had overpassed already the worst she could know of earthly sorrow. There could be nothing in reserve for her whilst this life lasted, either of joy or pain, like that which she had already known. And there had come down upon her young face a look of grave and settled quietness, such as we only see in those who have been brought through a very rough and strong sea, under dark skies and over lashing billows, to the “rest that remaineth.”

After all there is nothing so ennobling as sorrow, the sorrow which God sends, and which He gives us strength to bear. Taking the soul from its resting-place of human hopes and fancies, it throws it forth into the keen, clear mountain air, and bids it mount upward and still upward to those regions where the sky is purer and the breeze fresher, and

the clouds and mists of earth lie all beneath it. And if at first, like some poor little new-fledged bird, we do look back wearily and longingly to the warm-lined shelter we have left behind, it is only for a little while. We shall find a safer and a better one by and by, which we shall never need to leave any more.

Maud was a nobler woman now than she had ever been. A queenlier woman, as indeed she well might be, having received upon her meek brow the crown of thorns, the symbol here of that other and more glorious one which hereafter God's sorrowing children shall wear. A certain half perceptible halo of dignity had gathered upon her in place of the winning, child-like sweetness of her morning time. They had given over calling her "little Maud," and tendered her a grave, respectful reverence, which, indeed, she well deserved; such a reverence as we give unconsciously to any one, high or low, rich or poor, who stands under the shadow of a great grief.

So they two, Maud and Miss Nunly, were together in the little wainscoted parlour. They were very quiet, more so, perhaps, than most

people would have thought proper, and hardly reaching the ordinary limits of sociability. There were long gaps and breaks in the conversation; both of them often using that rare privilege of friendship—silence. It is only half friends who must needs keep up an incessant patter patter of conversation, lest, forsooth, their companions should think them “dull,” and begin to rally them up again, and force the tired wheels of talk to move round once more.

Maud was busy with some sewing work that she was doing for Miss Nunly; but she often let it lie idly in her lap, and looked down the Braeton road to where she could see Lingold Wood, and, by the early evening mist that rose from it, the lake in the park. The same wood which she and Stephen had tracked so often in early spring, and glowing summer, and golden-tinted autumn; the same lake beside which they two had stood last year, when the young October sun shone down upon it as it did now. It was four months since Stephen Roden had died.

Maud never spoke of him as having been killed. She never gave herself leave to rest on that pain-

ful scene of sudden, hopeless destruction ; but she always thought of him as "dying," nay, even as "falling asleep,"—as amid pain and tumult and uproar slept that other Stephen in Jerusalem of old. And she knew well, oh blessed knowledge for any to have of those they love, that He, the holy, the loving One, who received the martyr Stephen to his rest, had her Stephen in His presence too ; it was only for a little while, and they should meet again. Truly, no sorrow that has this light upon it should ever be called greater than we can bear. We may even try to thank God for it, though that trying may be hard sometimes, until we think how many like us have the sorrow, but not like us the rest which makes that sorrow light.

Following the track her thoughts had taken, Maud said at last, "I have been thinking about Stephen Roden."

"But you would not have him back again," Miss Nunly replied.

"No, not back again. It seems sometimes as if he could not be nearer to me than he is now ; we walk very closely together, very closely,

though I cannot see him any more. And, if ever I feel tired and weary, I just think of those last words of his,—‘It is only a little while,’ and my heart grows still, and the sorrow goes away.”

“As all sorrow will, Maud, that has no sin in it. We should never say of any grief that God has sent, it is too heavy for us. It is only the burdens we bring upon ourselves that weigh us down so that we cannot rise.”

Just then a burst of rude merriment from the distant street smote into the quiet little room. The people were laughing at a drunken woman who was staggering home from the course. There was a look of great sadness came over Miss Nunly's face as she heard it, of more than sadness, of self-reproach and bitterness. She was silent for a long time, listening to that hoarse laugh as it rang down the street.

“After all, Maud,” she said at last, as though speaking of some long past sorrow, “after all, the sting of death is *sin*, nothing but sin. Whether it be the death of our friends, or our hopes, or our enjoyments, death of whatever

kind—the sting of it is sin. There is no sting, however much there may be of regret, in remembering those, who, having gone from us, have left behind them a worthy and stainless name. Think Maud, if Stephen Roden had left you anything else to mourn over besides his death; if there had been the remembrance of unrighteous deeds, the galling thought of unkind words.”

Maud looked away over the Mar river and the green meadows to Braeton church, where he lay; and there came up into her heart a feeling of unbroken peace and quiet thankfulness, as she thought of all he had been to her. Miss Nunly went on.

“Be very sure, my child, tried and troubled as you have been, there is a sorrow far worse than that of losing our friends by death; it is to lose them by unworthiness. If they only die, we soon follow them, and all is right again; we have but to wait patiently a little while until our time comes. But, Maud, it is very bitter when any one dies to us—living still; when the death of sin and unworthiness lies between us and those who were once our life; when we think of them,

walking this same earth that we do, coming sometimes very near to us, breathing the air that we do, treading in our own footprints; when we can look into their faces, and hear their voices, and track them as they go along through life, yet feel all the while that they are farther apart from us; oh, how much farther than if God had taken them from us into heaven! This is death, Maud, the bitterness of death which never passes away."

Maud was silent still, her own sorrow seemed so easy to bear now. She tried to picture to herself how it would be if Stephen Roden could be upon this earth now; near her in body, just as he used to be; passing and repassing her day by day, yet hers no longer; lost to her by a death from which there was no resurrection, parted from her by the great gulf of sin which every day cleft wider and wider. It was a very terrible picture, one that made her shrink and tremble. And then she thought that perhaps this friend by her side could do more than picture it.

Miss Nunly never took any one into her heart to show them how empty and desolate it was. She told no one how, long ago, the fires had gone

out on the altar of hope, leaving there nothing but a few grey, crumbling ashes. She was not one of those who can turn themselves inside out like the zoophytes and sea-anemones on the rocks, and go on living just as comfortably as ever after the operation. She was not what is commonly called "transparent," lighted up ready to be looked through, admired or pitied by passers-by, as the case might be. Upon all her past life there hung the veil of a great silence, never lifted for any one; only showing by occasional throbbings that something lived and moved beneath it still. And from this long-practised quietness, people had learned to think that she was very easy and untroubled, and so brought her all their little cares and uneasiness to be sympathised with; wondering sometimes how it was that she was so skilled to soothe, so gentle to bind up the fretting wound, so wise to look upward and gather strength for coming need. They forgot how

"Eyes that have wept so much see clear."

Only sometimes, as now with Maud, she thought

more freely, and unlocked the springs of feeling, that comfort might flow from them to other hearts; not telling even Maud, though, whence those springs had their source. She went on, still looking out over the Marbrook hills, where the twilight was beginning to creep up.

“We should hardly call that death which only takes from us the bodily presence of our friends, and leaves the heart of them with us still, for comfort and companionship. We have but to think of them, and they are here; we have but to drop this little outer husk of words and looks and daily week-day cares, entering the still world of thought, and they are with us. After a while, we have but to die, and we shall be with them. Is this very much to murmur about? Is there any sting in this that we grieve over it so? Only a little while to walk alone; only a little while to miss the hand-clasp, the kind, pleasant voice, and all will be given back to us again, never to depart any more, never any more at all. It is that other death, Maud, that death in life, which it is so hard to bear; that death which takes from us

those who were our all in all, and gives them, not into the keeping of a tender and loving Father, to be treasured safely for us until we can come to them, not into heaven and rest and peace, but to sin and to recklessness. That death which strikes them apart from us, and throws them back into a world full of wickedness, where no tender thought of ours can reach them, from which no longing of ours can bring them back; and there is nothing left for us but to remember them with tears. You will never feel this, Maud. There are deeps of suffering in the world into which you have never looked. And thinking of them sometimes, it seems to me as if there were mysteries, too, which even heaven itself will never solve."

Quick descent from these elevated spheres of thought. The tramping of sublunary shoes was heard in the little entrance hall, such tramping, quick and busy, as was never heard save from the feet of Miss Gabbatis. And presently the straw bonnet of that brisk little spinster made its appearance within the door of the wainscoted room, followed, after a suitable interval, by the

whole of her outer woman, attired in the customary brown alpaca dress, and bearing the peripatetic umbrella, which had been officiating as a walking-stick along the Braeton road.

“Astonished to see me now, aren’t you, Miss Nunly?” said she, as she looked about for a convenient corner for her umbrella, and then proceeded to deposit herself in a rocking chair, “and on the October race night, too, of all others, and me an unprotected female. But really I’ll never put myself in the way of such an experience again, for what with drunken people, and young men going about with canes and cigars,—I don’t care for a little bit of Havanna smoke on a cold winter night, in fact, I’ve sometimes thought I should like to try it personally, but to be fumigated with it on a misty autumn evening is another thing altogether,—and what with men going about with fruit carts and ginger-beer trays and hot pies, and women with destitute families arranged in rows across the street, and little beggars in white pinafores singing ‘Willie, we have missed you!’ as if Willie hadn’t been told that interesting fact often enough to have become

properly aware of it before now,—I really did think, Miss Nunly, that I should never have got here at all. And, indeed, if it hadn't been for my umbrella, I should have had to give it up; but you see I poked it well forward, and it has a good sharp point, so the people made way for me a little, and here I am. But, deary me, Miss Nunly, these races are awful times."

Miss Nunly possessed the most rare and unselfish quality of adapting herself to the individual requirements of every guest who entered her doors, and was always ready to leave her own track of thought for one which might be more congenial with the moods of her friends. So she turned away from the window, and placed Miss Gabbatis a seat by the fire, and prepared to enter into conversation with her.

"Awful times, Miss Nunly, these races, specially when it rains and the roads get so muddy. And, if you'll excuse me, I'll just slip my shoes off, and put my feet on the fender. I'm sure I've been in purgatory, if there is such a place, ever since two o'clock this afternoon, with these canoes that the Braeton cobbler made me. It's

a strange thing, but I never can get that man to be suitably alive to my bunions. I'm sure I've preached him the length of a sermon times and times about it; but it never finds its way to his conscience. They're a troublesome thing are bunions, Miss Nunly; but perhaps you're not troubled with them?"

Miss Nunly was happy to say that she was not, and rang the bell for lights.

"Now, this *is* what I call nice," said Miss Gabbatis, when the lamp was set upon the table, and the crimson curtains drawn. "I always say no room ever looks so cosy as Miss Nunly's, except, perhaps, it may be your dining-room at Braeton Lodge, Miss Maud. You know I'm so fond of a bit of oak wainscoting; it gives such a family dignity to a place, and doesn't wear out like paper; and then that dear, funny, old-fashioned little mirror there in the corner, that makes one's face look just for all the world as round and weenie as a threepenny-bit; and that charming portrait of your father in his robes, with powdered hair and ruffles; and this warm-looking crimson carpet, with such a pretty little

pattern of oak stippled in to match the furniture; everything looks so nice and comfortable, you know. And then, Miss Nunly herself to correspond, always looking so good and pleasant, as if there wasn't such a thing in the world as care. You see what it is, Miss Maud, to have a quiet mind; it's the best possession one can have."

Maud thought so too, but she did not say so.

"I always come to see Miss Nunly when I want cheering up a bit, — you'll excuse me saying it, but, you know, I really must express my sentiments. I can't keep anything corked up, never could in my life; and I'm sure, if there's a piece of sunshine to be seen anywhere in Marbrook it gets into this little room of yours. I can't imagine how it is, but I suppose a happy life makes such a difference to look back upon."

"Will you excuse us going on with our work?" said Miss Nunly, taking up the little child's frock which lay upon the table.

"Oh dear, yes, to be sure; don't make any apologies, you know I'm not a stranger; in fact, I've got a bit of work myself in my pocket. I

always take a little something to do, in case my friends ask me to sit down; for my fingers, with always having led such an active life, go twitching if they aren't employed;" and Miss Gabbatis produced from the folds of her brown alpaca dress a piece of netting, intended at some future period to develope into an anti-macassar. Once upon a time it might have been pronounced white; but, by reason of multitudinous peregrinations round the village of Braeton, it had acquired a tint slightly the reverse.

"This anti-macassar of mine," said Miss Gabbatis, spreading the work out upon her lap, and jerking her foot up in the air to reach the string over it, ready for operations, and then unfolding her mesh and netting needle out of her pocket-handkerchief; "this anti-macassar of mine has been out to tea forty-nine times, and, you see, I haven't begun to darn the pattern in yet, so I'm not very industrious. I'm going to have a jubilee celebrated for it next time it goes out, which will be to your house, Miss Maud, as your mamma was kind enough to ask me to step over some day before long. You see I always make a

little knot on this side, every time it goes out, to keep count by. So Miss Mabel's not at the ball to-night — got something else to think about, I dare say. She used to have quite a taste for that sort of thing once, and no wonder, for I'm sure I never saw a white dress sit on any lady like Miss Mabel; and as for wreaths, you might have thought the flowers sprouted out of her head naturally, they seemed to know their places so well. But she's taken such a change upon her of late; it's been quite the talk of the village what a different girl she is since that visit to Scarbro'. I always said watering places made a crisis in anybody's life. But, by the way, Miss Nunly, have you heard of this shocking accident to-day at the races?"

Miss Nunly's face flushed, and a strange, unquiet look came there, as it always did when the races were mentioned.

"No; I see so few people that I rarely hear what is going on. But I hope it was not fatal?"

"But it was, though;" and Miss Gabbatis drew her mesh out to commence a fresh row; "killed

him dead on the spot; there wasn't a bit of life left in him. A gentleman from one of the great manufacturing places about here."

"Ah! Do you remember the name?"

"Yes; I've a capital memory for names and dates, and those sorts of things. I know all the people's names in Braeton, and their birthdays too. It was a Mr. Hardcastle, a bachelor gentleman, and a great racing man. Poor fellow! he's had one turn too much of it, that's all. But it's a sad thing, though. He was noted on the turf, and attended all the races regularly about here, and used to make a mint of money by betting, for somehow he always won. I make a point of pitying people that die on a sudden, specially if they were unprepared, as he was by all accounts."

"How did it happen?"

"But then, you know, we never can believe what people say. I remember when my eldest brother, that died twenty years ago next apple-gathering, was a young man, he was telling me about one of his fellow-students who laid a wager to go to ——"

"But the accident, Miss Gabbatis," said Miss Nunly, in her usual quiet voice.

"Yes, I hadn't forgotten it, but you see I'm such a one to run off after stories that happen to come into my head. Well, you know at this race the gentlemen ride their own horses, and he rode his, and it went over a ditch with him, and threw him, and broke his neck there and then, without making any more to do about it. He never spoke any more; of course he couldn't when his neck was broke. I wonder how people look under such circumstances, whether their heads seem to hang loose, or what. I never saw an accident in my life, except a little boy that got his finger trapped off with a door banging to, and, my word, how he screamed! But it's a very shocking thing is this. Of course they telegraphed to his friends at once, and I suppose they'll put him in a shell to-night and take him back to where he came from. His poor wife,—but I forgot, he is a bachelor, and that's a good thing. I never make much account of bachelors dying."

Miss Nunly had laid her work down in her

lap, and was listening to Miss Gabbatis, with a face hushed and calm as ever; but her fingers tightened their grasp of each other every moment, and her breath came quick and short. Ah! these races.

“Yes; it’s a shocking thing when one comes to think about it, very. You don’t seem to like to hear about accidents, Miss Nunly. Now you see what a difference there is in people. Why, first thing whenever I get hold of a newspaper, I fly to the column of casualties, and see what’s happened in that line. I’ve said fifty times over, if I’d only been a man, what a good surgeon I should have made. You know I don’t get upset easily. I don’t think it would give me the least bit of a turn to see anybody run over, although it would upset some people for a week, and it’s made you look white only to hear about something happening; it’s astonishing how differently people take things. I’ll thank you, Miss Maud, just to undo this knot in my netting; at my time of life people’s eyes aren’t so good as they used to be.”

Maud unfastened the knot and set the work

afloat again. It went briskly on for about an hour longer, mingled with a pleasant little running chat, on the part of Miss Gabbatis, concerning things that were going on in a general way. She didn't care much about getting an answer, or whether it fitted rightly when it did come; because, as she said, she liked to hear herself talking, and it seemed to come easier when she didn't feel that she was keeping any one else from doing it. Before it was dark the carriage came for Maud, and Miss Gabbatis accepted her offer of a ride home, packed away her netting, gathered up her shoes and umbrella, and Miss Nunly was left to her solitude.

When they were both gone, she collected the work from the table and packed it carefully away in the basket. It was a white frock for Milly Dakin's baby, who was going to be christened next Sunday. Miss Nunly was never idle. Perhaps for her, as well as for Maud, there was the need, the constant need, of something to do, lest the heart, having lost its first hope and labour of love, should become weary and peevish. After all, it is only this that one half of us need,

to make us truly peaceful and content. Just something to do; something for our energies to work at, something that others may be the better for. But, be that as it may, Miss Nunly was never idle. Come when they might, morning, noon, or night, her friends were sure to find her employed.

Except in those few moments between the lights, when twilight began to creep up over the sky, and the Marbrook hills grew dim, and the wind eddied dreely through the tall old elm trees outside the window. Then, in the stillness of that little wainscoted parlour, she would sit and think.

Where those thoughts travelled—into what far distant track, painful or pleasant, they bore her—was not for others to know. Sufficient for the world without that she did her duty to it bravely and well; that to her power, and often beyond her power, she helped those who needed help, and gave sympathy to those who were desolate and oppressed. More than that, it had no need to ask. Of her own inner life Miss Nunly never spoke; it was lived very sacredly between God

and her own soul, and whatever shadow of old hopes and memories it held, was held for herself alone. To show them to others could do no good. Truly life for her had been very different from what she had once thought; but such as it was, she took it and made the best of it — quietly covering over its old scars and bruises, living it so wisely and so well, that none, even of those who loved her best, ever thought how marred and maimed it was underneath.

When she had made everything very tidy and neat, Miss Nunly went upstairs to her own room, from which, looking out over Mossingay meadows, she could see the race-course with its white winning-posts, and grand stand, and the booths erected for to-morrow's populace. She watched them until it grew dark, and then came down again to the empty parlour. She closed the shutters, that she might not hear the elm tree branches rattle against the window; then she put the lamp out and stirred the fire into a dancing blaze, and drew up close by her easy chair, a quaint, old-fashioned, black oak cabinet,

which had belonged to her great-grandmother, and stood within a little recessed arch on one side of the fireplace. There were many drawers in it full of relics : — treasures that had belonged to her father and mother, to her sister Alice, who died thirty years ago ; tresses of hair that long-buried friends had given her ; little keepsakes of dainty workmanship, embroidered by hands that had forgotten their cunning, and had been crumbling these many years in Marbrook churchyard ; letters, time-worn, mouldering, and yellow, written very close and thick, crossed and recrossed, as letters used to be in the old posting times, — letters written to herself, and beginning with “ My dear girl,” — she now so grey-haired that few were left to remember the childhood of her life, or talk with her of the days when she was indeed young ; flowers, — a rose that had been given her at a ball nearly thirty years ago, and worn for an hour or two in her bosom, then put away into that old cabinet, where it had remained ever since ; a sprig of rosemary that had been laid in her sister’s hand before she was

years ago, when they two had stood together at the park gates after their long ramble, and he had plucked those four little woodcock feathers from the head of game that hung over his broad shoulders, giving them to her, half in jest and half in earnest, to keep for his sake until he came back again, — for the first time since that September morning, the name of Robert Hardcastle was missing from her prayers. He had gone now where even they, earnest as they had always been, could do him no more good.

Next morning she visited her poor people, and went about her little home duties, and received her friends as usual ; a little more silently, perhaps, but as kindly as ever. And none of them knew, not even Maud, the dearest, that the one great hope and longing of her life had just died out. No one knew that morning by morning and night by night, through all those weary years, she had prayed for him that he might be made pure and perfect ; that little by little, step by step, she had watched him sinking into the great slough of worldliness, till hardly a trace of

the noble manhood in him was left; that, still near him often in bodily presence, there had yet fallen between them the utter death and blank of separation. No one knew — why should they? — that all through his gay and careless life her love had held fast to him, though year after year left less to cling to; that still as his unworthiness struck them farther and farther apart, she thought of him as he once was, as he yet might be, wishing and praying for his weal; until now he had died, and left no sign, nothing to hope for.

Oh, if none of our prayers are lost, where were hers for him?

So the Marbrook races got over, and the company went home, and everything settled down again into its usual sober quietness, and everybody went back as usual to the old track, Miss Nunly amongst the rest. And the tides of life went on just as smoothly as before over the hope that had gone down under them for ever. After all, perhaps she suffered no more than many do in this great world of God's, whom none

ever think of pitying, because their sorrow is unseen. And for her, as for them, it is over at last, and rest comes; even the rest when we can look back upon this strange story of our past lives, and say, as He does who seeth the end from the beginning, "It is well."

CHAPTER VIII.

Braston, October 2nd.—It is October now. The sycamore leaves in Lingold Wood are tipped with gold, and the great Virginian creeper that winds round Papa's study window is beginning to blush crimson in the warm autumn sunshine. I shall watch these leaves deepen and change no more, as I have watched them so many years in my father's house in my youth. Before the last of them has fallen, before we can see Glinton Manor again from the little bridge in the wood, before this white jasmine that shines in at my open window now has shed its last starry flower down upon the grass, I shall be his wife,—Philip's wife!

Very beautiful, very holy, very solemn, very full of all precious thoughts to me, my future is. I wonder now, as I have often wondered before,

how girls can laugh and joke about "getting settled," as they call it; how they can make a common jest, as Isabella Ponde used to do, of such a great, utter change. Still more I wonder how some girls, like Janet Ducie and Mrs. Herman Kaye's niece, can talk over their love, and triumph in it, and parade it about, instead of rather hiding it down, as I think all true love must wish to be hidden, far away in our inmost hearts, where no eye can look upon it but God's and our own.

Philip went away on Thursday, the morning after Maud's wedding-day. I shall see him no more now until he comes again with these red leaves and purple sunsets of October, to take me back with him.

How strange it was to wake that first August morning with the feeling that I belonged to him! To wake morning by morning with his face upon my thoughts was no new thing, but it took me long to realise that other and glorious thought, that we were one now; that no time nor distance should have power to separate us; that the whole tearful past was swept away; that my

poor, pale dreams of patience and unwearying, uncomplaining regret were taken up and melted into the bright reality of a love that would be my crown all through life. How strange all this seemed! And thinking of it all, and trying to look upon the dazzling brightness, I could but thank God for it, and give the first moments of that golden morning time to prayer.

We had a long walk that morning, Philip and I, before he went away, to Lingold Lake and the bridge, and then home by the watercourse, through Marbrook dale; very early, before any one was abroad to watch us, or to come after us to Braeton with petty gossip about the strange gentleman who had been seen walking with Miss Harcourt. How beautiful the wood looked in the dew and sunshine of that first August morning! How bright the white clouds' mirrored beauty in the lake, how musical the flicker of the little Mar brook through the fern, how soft the pearly haze which lay upon the distant hills and wooded slopes! Was it because we were so glad that all else shone upon us and took the tinge of our own thoughts? We both paused when we

came to the bridge, and fell unconsciously into our old positions; Philip leaning over the wooden rail, looking down into the clear glancing lake, and I beside him—just as we two had stood there nearly a year ago, only that now my hand was fast held in his, and we could say, instead of thinking it, all that lay in our hearts.

But of what we said then, and of the thoughts, both bright and solemn, which came thronging over us, why should I stay to write the story here? Are they not held truly, faithfully, in my memory, as all words of his have ever been—as all words must be, spoken for us by those we love? And so on through the wood, where rays of sunlight were tangled among the thick green leaves; bright, flashing sunlight everywhere, save where cool little bits of shadow, as though lingering from last night's grey twilight, lay among the trees, and under the broad fern leaves, and within the long aisles of copse and overarching boughs,—soft, tender shadows, making the sunlight more bright, just as those other shadows that were left in our hearts from bygone months of gloom lingered quietly upon the track of present joy. And then

through Marbrook dale home again, past Glinton Manor, the home that was to have been Maud's; looking so grey, and worn, and mossy, where everything else was fresh. Passing by the old-fashioned garden, and noting how the flowers that Stephen Roden had planted were blossoming brave and gay when he had left them for ever, and how the dream-light of stillness and peace yet rested on the spot, I prayed that all, and perhaps there may be many such, to whom a crushing grief like Maud's had come, might find that grief, as indeed it had been to her, an angel in disguise, leading them onward to all that is noble, and beautiful, and true.

We came home in time for breakfast, and then Philip went away. Next time I see him it will be never to lose sight of him any more. But I am not lonely; he is always with me in heart, and nothing can separate us now; no matter how far apart for a while the lines of our outer lives may run, still we are one — always one. And not for earth only, but for heaven. It is this that makes me feel so happy, — the thought that our love, Philip's and mine, with all that it can

bring to us, is for evermore; that, whatever may come between us on earth, we shall find each other again in heaven.

This beautiful October month! How soft the sunlight falls upon the garden walk! What a crisp, dewy freshness in the air! What a gay dance and sparkle of thousand dewy blades of grass as I look up the orchard path! This long delicate jasmine branch straggling across the window, its shadow lies upon my paper; I can trace with my pen every leaf and flower and tiny stem, even the butterfly too that has come to settle on one of the leaves — so still is the air, and so pure the light. I shall not sit here many more times to write my life-story. I wonder, if I were to come again next year at this time, and sit here writing as I do now, whether I should see this same jasmine shadow lying upon my paper, with just the same outline of leaves and flowers, with just the same graceful sway and bend, the same delicate sprays, the same clear, regular, star-like blossoms — perhaps I should; but the story would be very different, very different.

My future home is in the north of England — a

very beautiful country, Philip tells me, though I have never seen it; something like this Braeton of ours, but girded in by loftier hills, and with more of rugged scenery about it than we have here. And there I shall work with him and for him, in his parish; quite away from the bustling world, from gay company and brilliant city amusements. I shall not even have Marbrook there to break the quiet. I, who used once to have such grand dreams of shining in society, and dazzling others by my conversational powers, and taking the place which I proudly thought belonged to me in circles of fashion. How different now! But never mind.

Yes, indeed, how different! I have been reading some of those pages that I wrote a long time ago, before ever Papa and I went to Scarbro', or Maud was engaged to Stephen Roden; and it seems to me that it is not the same Mabel Harcourt at all who is writing now. Such a new life, such an utterly new life, has come to me. There is no more longing for display, no more wearying for something to do, no more proud, moody discontent at what I was pleased to call my isolated

position. Old things are passed away, and all things new become. I can recall just now so well the feeling with which, a long time ago, that cold, clear February evening, I came up here into this room, and unwrapped the blank book which I had bought at Marbrook that afternoon, and drew the table up to the fire, and began writing for the first time the thoughts that came into my head. Dreary thoughts they were. I had such a feeling then as if my whole life were unhinged and out of joint. I seemed to be of no use, to have no place in the world. I had not learned then how the simplest little duty becomes noble if we take it up and do it as for God,—how all talent, all power, is only truly worthy so far as we use it for God, in everything tending upward to Him. Then came Maud's engagement, and the dreary blank that it seemed to bring to me in my human selfishness; then our two months at Scarbro', and with that the dawning of a new life. I smile now to read that sea-side story: my first impressions of Philip — "Mr. Lowe" he was then, and is now, and always will be, except when we are alone together; how

little by little I felt the links of his strong nature drawing round me, and the spell of his iron will gathering over me, until I, who used to be so proud and self-dependent, came to be like a child in his presence. And to recall the tones of his voice when as yet they were strange to me; the steady, firm tramp of purpose sounding in every word; that sometimes autocratic way — you have it even now, Philip — in which he would put down Isabella Ponde's loose laughter, or the collegians' pompous uppishness; and that grave, silent magic of influence which swayed us all before it. And to shut my eyes, as I often do, to see again the strong, clearly chiselled lines of his face as I remember it then, so instinct with decision and self-control, so proud in its calmness, so earnest in its strength. All just the same now, Philip, only softened, when I look at you, by a haze of tenderer feeling than I found there in those first months: such a feeling, is it not, as Maud saw on my face when I came home again, softening all the harsher lines into a warm overtone of love?

And then — ah! but I will not speak of the

rest. I can remember it all, and that is enough. The quick, bright gleam of gladness, and then those long, dreary winter months of gloom, wherein I learned, O Philip! what you would have taught me before — that only in a heart at peace with God is there any rest for us; that only putting away these trappings of self and pride, and coming home as wandering children to a faithful Saviour, is life's true grandeur reached; that only through the stormy waters of humiliation, and utter hopelessness of all human help or might, are we ever brought to the haven where we would be. If I learn nothing more than this, my life will not have been spent in vain.

I wonder if any one else, in writing a journal, would have as many changes to note as I have written here since first I began. Perhaps it may be so, for they say the world is full of change. What room to pray, then, that for all to whom these changes come, there may come with them such rest at last as I have found!

After all, leaving home is a serious thing, a very serious thing. There is a strange sort of

feeling, not altogether pleasant, in going one by one over haunts which you have known from childhood, and feeling that they are yours no longer; in meeting old familiar faces that have looked kindly at you ever since you can remember, and knowing that you will soon, very soon, be parted from them by a new, untried life, from which to that other and first home-life there is no returning any more for ever. These things make one sad.

Only a few days more, and I shall be gone, never to come back to Braeton as my home. I have not spoken so kindly of it sometimes as I might have done, but I can give it a friendly resting-place in my memory, and think pleasantly, if not lovingly, of its people and belongings. I began last week to gather up my little possessions, to sort over my letters, books, and papers, ready for going away. I try to keep these preparations from Maud as much as I can, and I never talk to her either about leaving home. Yet she has been thinking of it all along. It was only yesterday I was standing before my wardrobe, turning over the drawer where I

kept my childish relics, — Aunt Miriam's pocket-book, and some of Walter's playthings, a silent little record of my long past life, — when Maud came gently in, and laid something down on the chair beside me. She just kissed me, and said, "They will help to make your Elverton drawing-room look nice, Mabel," and then she slipped away again. When I opened the paper, there was that cushion, that dark green velvet cushion with the wreath of white lilies and forget-me-nots, which last spring I had watched week after week growing into beauty under Maud's deft fingers; while she bent over it with eyes full of sweet thoughts, and the bright glinting smile upon her face. And beside it, white and snowy, and delicate and graceful as the frost on Lingold Lake in winter time, was the mosaic work cover that every one used to admire so much; the cover which Stephen Roden helped to design, and into which she had worked so many loving thoughts of him. And there were other little matters too, which she had made herself, thinking all the while how bonnie they would look in the old wainscoted rooms of Glinton Manor.

O Maud, what have I done that to me should be given the bright, golden reality of love, while for you only the past is left?

Next time I write in this book, it will not be here, sitting in the shade of these white curtains, and watching the clouds come and go upon the Downshire hills; not here where I have thought and felt and suffered so much

I have the little photograph that Philip sent me lying upon my desk now. I always like to have it in sight when I am writing. Not his portrait, — no, I never wanted to have that; I keep it more pure and perfect and lasting in my heart than any painter could ever make it; — not his portrait, but the picture of my future home, which he sent me in the first letter I ever had from him. This village of Elverton, how very calm, how very quiet it looks! The old church, almost as quaint and antique as ours at Braeton, with the low carved porch, and the square tower laced over with ivy branches, and the funny old-fashioned little vestry, that Philip and I will have to go in at, I suppose, for it is just opposite the

rectory door. I rather like the look of the rectory too, with its Elizabethan pointed roof and low windows opening to the lawn. That will be the study, I fancy, that looks over into the church. Philip and I will often sit there in summer evening, and watch the sun go down behind that great mountain that girds in the distance. This broken-down stile in the foreground leads perhaps to the wood where Philip told me he had so often walked alone, thinking of me, that long, dreary time after he left us at Braeton. He shall often walk there again, but not alone. And there is a little brook runs close past the rectory garden. I can almost see it flashing and sparkling in the picture. What beautiful forget-me-nots they will be that grow down on those mossy banks, and how I shall like to gather those tall flag leaves and grasses that spring among the loose stones! Those ferns, too, — they must be ferns, here under this hedge side, — I shall know them again when I see them, I am sure, if they have not faded. I shall know that tall old tree too — is it an elm? — that grows by the stile leading into the wood. I wonder if there are any rooks'

nests in it. Then those little cottages just past the churchyard — does Margot live in one of them, I wonder, the old woman who was Philip's nurse when he was a baby? He told me once she lived in the village. I will go to her when I get there, and hear all about him; a grave, silent, abstracted sort of youngling I should think you were, my lord and master that is to be. Perhaps, whilst I am looking at the picture just now, he is in one of the cottages, reading to the people, and comforting them in their troubles, if they have any. This view must have been taken very early in the morning, for the shadows lie so sharp and clear upon the grass — they are so long too; that elm tree reaches quite up the road, almost as far as the meadows. I wonder if those meadows are pleasant to walk in; if there are many wild flowers in them; if there is plenty of moss to be found along the hedge-sides; if cowslips and violets grow there. Philip and I will soon find out.

“Philip and I!” How naturally the words seem to sound, just as if they had always belonged to each other; with a pleasant, ringing,

familiar music, like some dear old tune! And yet, little more than a year ago, I had not even seen him or heard his name. Now it will always be "Philip and I;" nothing will come between us any more. Philip and I in joy, Philip and I in sorrow; if loss and disappointment and weariness come, Philip and I will share them together; if joy and hope fulfilled, we will be thankful for them. No grief will be utterly dark so long as Philip and I can divide it between us. "Philip and I," through life until death; and after that, when all time is past away, in that other and purer world from which all earthly feeling and earthly sorrow are purged, it will be the same—"Philip and I," never to be parted any more for ever.

Yonder is Maud coming up the garden. I will put away my picture now, and go with her for our walk through the village. How many wait for her coming daily to cheer them! If she were taken away, how much sunshine would be missed here! I will try to be like her. I will try to make some one glad every day so long as I stop here in Braeton, and then ——

October 9th, Monday evening. — A year ago to-night, on just such a tranquil, half-dark evening as this, I sat here in my window, looking out into the deepening twilight, and waiting for Mr. Lowe to come. The golden autumn time has returned, the trees shed their crimson leaves all round me; I hear the same undertone of decay, of Nature weary with her long year's work, and sighing for the sleep of winter to come. Again these calm, grey, twilight evenings draw on, when the shadows creep up so softly upon my Lingold Wood, and over Braeton valley, and along the dimpling lines of these Downshire hills. Everything without has wound back to its old place, and I too have come here again as I did a year ago to-night, to listen for his coming; not with wonderment and uncertainty and longing, as then, but very calmly, very solemnly. For this is indeed the last time I shall sit here listening to the old familiar household sounds within, and the same soft chiming of bells and rustling of autumn branches without. This old life of mine is going from me, and I lay it away with a strange feeling

of reverence, almost of regret. To-morrow will unlock the gates of that other and untried one.

Maud is to be my bridesmaid — only Maud. She will have it so. I never say “poor Maud” now — I never even think it, for there seems to have come down upon her whole life such a great peacefulness; a perfect rest, which is never given but as the price of tears; at times almost a bright and springing joy, as though always around her and over her there was his unseen presence, making the dark places light. She is just as quiet, just as busy, just as useful as ever; only with a shade of sweet dignity in every look and motion, which those may well wear who bear for their Master such a holy cross as He has given her. Maud, I think I know now what those words mean, “Perfect through suffering.”

It gets very dark. I can but just see the grey tower of the church, and trace the outline of the trees round it. When next this twilight falls I shall not be watching it here. Good-bye, Braeton! Good-bye, old life of mine! Good-bye, Lingold Wood, with your crimson leaves dropping in the

sunshine, and your little brook flickering through the fern! Good-bye! Braeton valley, with your long sweeps of shadow and brightness! Good-bye, good-bye!

I hear footsteps on the walk. Philip has come.

CHAPTER IX.

MABEL'S wedding passed over very quietly. No one knew of the day except Miss Nunly, so there was no crowd of idle loungers and gossiping lookers-on to disturb the sacredness of the place and time in which she entered upon her new life. After the marriage the little household at Braeton Lodge soon fell into the old track. Maud took upon her, one by one, the duties which her elder sister had been used to perform : the morning readings to Mrs. Harcourt in her own room ; the copying out of manuscript for her papa ; those many little offices of kindness which had been habitually left for Mabel to attend to, and whose neglect might have marred the home-comfort when she was gone. Perhaps it was well for Maud that she had thus to absorb her

sister's sphere of duty into her own, and so gain fresh food for thought and energy, which kept the springs of life in busy motion. For there are some times of our history when rest would be poison to us; when only in action, constant, well-directed, healthy action, can any content or comfort be earned.

Miss Gabbatis brought her netted anti-macassar to pay its jubilee visit to Braeton Lodge, soon after the wedding. As soon as she thought that the family would have got comfortably settled down and heard tidings of the bride—for, as she said, it was no use going until there was something to be learned about how they were enjoying themselves—she arrayed herself in the drab-coloured alpaca with green stripes round the flounces, her fancy straw bonnet with white strings, and the coloury-patterned barège shawl which has already made its appearance in the course of this narrative. Miss Gabbatis was not particular about adhering to the orthodox hour for paying visits of ceremony; she rather preferred dropping in of an evening, as being a more chatty opportunity, when people had got the

day's cares off their minds, and had a clear course with nothing to do until supper-time. On Tuesday evening, therefore, about a week after Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lowe had departed on their wedding tour, just as the shadows of twilight were creeping up, and the labourers were returning home from their daily toil, this aforementioned costume might have been seen in full sail down the Braeton road, past the old beech tree and the orchard hedge, and up the gravel walk which led to the Lodge.

"And so we've got dear Miss Mabel married," she said, when she had shaken hands with Mrs. Harcourt and Maud, and set her umbrella down in the corner, and smoothed her bonnet strings, and found herself a comfortable seat by the fire; "we've got dear Miss Mabel married! Well, I *am* glad—I really am! I do feel it such a weight off my mind when a young person gets comfortably settled, and put into a right track for life. I'm sure, when the curate's wife met me, a fortnight ago to-morrow, and told me it was going to be, I could have put my arms round her neck there and then in Marbrook streets, and

kissed her; I felt so glad — I did indeed. You know, Miss Mabel was always a favourite of mine; so very talented, and all that sort of thing, and used to count so beautifully to her music, and play her tunes with such expression. I'm sure I always said when she had done her lesson — not to herself, you know, Mrs. Harcourt; for I wouldn't have thought it proper to put such notions into a young girl's mind — but I always *did* say it to myself, that I hoped, when Miss Mabel married, she would look out for a husband with a proper affection for music. Mr. Lowe likes it, doesn't he now?"

"Not very much, I believe," said Maud, who was sitting in the bay-window with her knitting; looking out as she worked into the half-darkness, and watching how the outlines of the Braeton woods grew fainter and fainter upon the deepening sky; "at least he enjoys it in a certain way — every one does that, you know — but I don't suppose he appreciates first-rate playing."

"Well, then, that's what I call a pity; that dear Miss Mabel's finger-ends should be wasted so, and her capabilities. I was always so proud of her

music, though I only had the honour of taking her as far as the scales. Still, you know, the foundation's everything; and I'm sure the way she used to play those little preludes in Hamilton's exercises was enough to fetch the tears into my eyes—it was indeed; such beautiful expression, and so full of feeling. I'm sure St. Cecilia herself, if she leads the music in heaven, couldn't play those preludes more beautifully than Miss Mabel used to do; and to think that Mr. Lowe won't be able to appreciate them! Dear me, but I am disappointed—I am indeed. He's a clergyman, I understand; the same that preached here the summer before last. Well, that isn't the sort of thing I should have fancied for Miss Mabel; but she has been wonderfully changed of late, and I shouldn't wonder if she brings her mind to her circumstances, and manages pretty well. And then, you know, I always think it's such a nice thing to marry into the Church; my own dear brother at the University is quite a stay to my respectability, I consider. Not, you know, in the least that I think your family needs raising. Nothing of the sort; for I always said, if

there was any aristocracy at all, you had as good a right to belong to it as any one, with that Norman pedigree of yours that dear Miss Mabel used to be so proud of; only, you know, as I said, it's a sort of stay, and makes one feel important. I'm sure Mrs. Herman Kaye never appears to such effect as when she mentions her nephew, the archdeacon; it really has a sound with it, it has indeed, Mrs. Harcourt. But, do you know, Miss Maud, I should have thought it so very much more natural if *you* had happened on a clergyman yourself; you really were born to be a pastor's wife, and nourish and bring up children for the Church. I never could see it exactly clear in my own mind that you had done the very best possible thing in the world when I heard of your being engaged to poor dear Mr. Roden, though of course ——"

Here Miss Gabbatis recollected that she had got upon painful ground, and evinced her discomposure by twitching her bonnet strings, and commencing a series of dislocated sentences — none of which, somehow or other, could be got to a satisfactory conclusion, — to the effect that she was

so very forgetful, *would* Miss Maud excuse her, but really she *did* let things slip out sometimes so very unfortunately ; and then, not being able to think of anything else, she drank Mrs. Philip Lowe's health with a sudden gulp, and hoped she would be very happy all the days of her life.

But she need not have been so confused. Maud scarcely seemed to heed the touch so rudely laid upon her sorrow. She had reached the still waters now, where a few breezes more or less could make but little difference. She went quietly on with her work, her fingers not even trembling; and then she turned the conversation by asking if Miss Gabbatis had found the road lonely.

Miss Gabbatis, glad enough to be once more on a safe track, plunged eagerly into the subject.

"Not a bit of it, my dear. I mostly whistle when I'm coming along by myself, and it seems to make quite a nice bit of company ; and as for being molested, why, you know, I'm not the most attractive person in the world for anybody to molest. I never but once in my life experienced anything unpleasant when I was out at a night, and then I thought I shouldn't have got home

till morning for laughing, it was so very amusing, it really was. It was about two years ago, just when they got that fresh regiment from Gibraltar, at the Marbrook barracks, you know, rather a miraculous lot of men for such a quiet place as this; and I was coming home from Miss Nunly's rather late, in fact it was nearly ten o'clock, past that sharp corner, you know, which leads across the Depôt to the barrack gates. And I was thinking of something else at the time, indeed my mind was so much preoccupied that I quite forgot to whistle as I generally do; you see, it was near about the time when my dear brother generally wrote to me, and I was wondering whether I should rise in the morning time enough for the postman, or let him put the letter under the door, —when I came flush upon this corner I tell you of, and walked straight into somebody's arms."

"Oh, Miss Gabbatis, how glad you must have been that it was dark!" said Mrs. Harcourt, a tinge of merriment rippling up over her quiet face, as she sat by the lamp with her lacet-work.

"Well, it *would* have been slightly inconvenient in the day time, I must confess, and me a

maiden lady too, and so well conducted as I've always used my endeavours to be, ever since I was a resident in this neighbourhood, which will be twenty years next Lady-day. But, as I was saying, I walked straight into somebody's arms; it was a soldier, I could just see by the shining of his belt, for there was a lamp not very far off in front of the guard-house. Well, he didn't seem a bit surprised, but just folded me up as snug and quiet and comfortable as anything. It was a dreadful position, was it not, for me to be placed in? And whilst I was thinking what I could possibly do to get out of the scrape,—for he was such a great, tall fellow, it wasn't a bit of use trying to move any way,—he actually stooped down, and was just going to kiss me—in fact, I felt his moustache rumpling my clean bonnet cap—and he said, 'My darling Grace,' in the most coaxing tone you can imagine; when all of a sudden he found out I wasn't the right one. 'Ugh, you wizened old creature!' he growled in such a different tone—oh, *such* a different tone, you wouldn't have thought anybody's voice could have made such a change, Mrs. Harcourt! and back went his arms,

just like the ends of a bit of spring wire when you leave hold of them, and away I set off down the road as fast as ever my feet could take me, glad enough, as you may think, to be safely under my own protection again. But, really, when I came to think about it, and when I had felt my bonnet to know if it had got very much rumpled, and straightened my shawl, it did seem such a very amusing thing, that I set to and laughed until I couldn't stop myself, for, of course, being quite dark and a lonely road, there was no need to restrain my feelings."

"Poor man! it would be rather a disappointment."

"Well, I can't undertake to say anything about that. I don't know what sort of a personal appearance his 'darling Grace' possessed; but I hope it was more bewitching than mine. I met a young woman about five minutes after, that I thought might be the right one, but I didn't look back to see if it was so, as I wanted to be home again. And that's the only time in my life, Mrs. Harcourt, that I've ever approached to anything like going to be kissed by a member of the opposite

sex; except, you know, my own family connections, and of course one doesn't count them. I did feel so thankful it happened in the dark; and somehow I was rather glad when the regiment went away, for you know it would have been such an awkward thing if he'd remembered what I looked like. Indeed, I never dared go past the barracks in the same shawl any more whilst they stayed in Marbrook.

"But, I was going to tell you, only I got drawn off into this long sideways story, as I always do when I intend to go straight forwards: I was going to tell you how I came to be out rather late to-night. You know I've been to see Betty Hayes. She lived cook at Mr. Sharrup's once, where I used to teach music, and she was kinder to me there than anybody else, so that I make a point now of going to see her once a month or so, and remembering her with a little something nice now and then, as she's an old maid, like me, and lives all alone by herself, except a niece, eight years old, that she's taken to bring up."

"So that's the little girl, who has been ill with

the sore throat so long?" asked Maud. "I think Miss Nunly knows them."

"The very same, my dear; and she's been ordered to take three powders every day to strengthen her; a great affliction, I consider, for a small child like her, and as bad entirely as the sore throat. Powders are such awful things to take! I'm sure, I remember when I was ten years old, standing before our kitchen fire for a whole hour, crying, with a teaspoon in my hand that mother had been mixing me a powder in. And really I couldn't get it down, no, I *couldn't*; and I didn't know what to do. At last my eldest brother, the one that's Professor at the University now, went and got me a beautiful large gooseberry out of the garden, and squeezed the inside out, and then we put the powder in and tied it up with a little bit of cotton, and I got it down that way. But I've never forgotten it, and I always pity anybody that has the same thing to pass through. And so you know, when I heard that poor little Polly Hayes had got powders to take, I just thought I'd run down with a pot of my winesour

preserves for her; it helps the taste away, you know, does a little preserve."

"But a less expensive sort of jam would have answered the purpose, would it not?" said Mrs. Harcourt.

"A very natural remark, Mrs. Harcourt, and just what I was going to say myself; but you see this was how it was. You know it was in September, just about the time that Miss Kaye was going to be married, and I'd been on the look-out for winesours for some time; and one morning a woman came by with the most beautiful basketful you ever saw, and she told me I should have them for five shillings. Well, I never grudge money over winesours, they're so very delicious, and these were the real sort; I could tell that, you know, by the stones. So I bought the whole lot, and set to work there and then to pick them. Bessy made up a good fire, and by ten o'clock I had got them on in the great brass pan, and the syrup was just beginning to boil out. I was weighing up the sugar, a pound to a pound of fruit, you know, when I heard a great passing of carriages; and running out to the front door, what should I see

but Miss Kaye's wedding in the very act of going past. I never feel comfortable to let a wedding go past without paying proper attention to it, for I'm a sincere admirer of the married state, and I've only abstained from entering it myself because nobody ever asked me. So I ran upstairs, just as I was, in my apron and petticoat, to one of the top windows that had a good view of the street; picking an old slipper out of the shoe-closet as I went past, to throw after them for good luck, for you know I like old observances to be kept up."

"And very nice they looked. The bride, in white muslin tucked up to the waist, as I could see plain enough, for her dress spread out so in the carriage; and a lace mantle, the loveliest shape you ever saw, coming down in a point behind, and square ends in front, finished off with tassels; and the bridesmaids, four of them, in pink tarletane and tulle bonnets, with bunches of white roses at the sides, and their hair turned upside down, like the Empress Eugenie's, and white scarves put on across, and fastened on the shoulder with a pink bow to match the dress. But do you

know, Mrs. Harcourt, when I got down stairs again, there were my winesours boiling over into the fire as fast as ever they could go, and making *such* a hearth! I really thought we never *should* have got that hearth clean again. And when I ran into the back kitchen to fetch a floor-cloth to clean it up a little bit, there was my maid Bessy mounted up on the washing-tub at the window, watching the tail end of the procession as it turned round the corner. Of course I couldn't scold her, for she'd as good a right to leave the preserves and enjoy the wedding as I had; but it made my winesours look not quite so nice as they would have done had Miss Kaye been married a couple of hours later. So you see, I thought as they weren't fit for company, one little pot might do for Betty Hayes's niece to have her powders in, and I've been taking it to her to-night."

And Miss Gabbatis, having reached the end of this somewhat elongated explanation, unpinned her shawl, took out her netting, and settled herself down to a comfortable evening's chat; while Mrs. Harcourt's fingers glided over the filmy lacet-work, and Maud sat in the shadow of the window

curtains, half-dreaming, half-waking; catching from time to time stray drops and snatches of news that Miss Gabbatis was rehearsing in her pleasant, racy style, from the other side of the room; yet all the while wrapped round in that mantle of separate, self-contained thought, which never enfolds us more completely than when the busy little concerns and interests of daily life are being discussed around us.

The vacuum caused by Mabel Harcourt's sudden withdrawal from the Braeton sphere, was speedily filled by a rush of windy gossip. Mrs. Sharrup convened a tea party to consider the event, and issue such remarks, benevolent or otherwise, thereupon, as occasion might seem to demand. Mrs. Herman Kaye also entertained a few friends from the upper ten of the village, at a select dinner party, and felt it her duty to make a few remarks on the impropriety of having weddings got up in such a close sort of manner that nobody had the opportunity of even expressing their opinion about it until cards were sent, and the whole thing came down upon them like a thunderbolt. The Misses Farbelook put

on their new autumn bonnets and French cloaks for the first time, and made a round of morning calls, on the strength of the occasion; wherein they were drawn out to unfold their sentiments in a manner which, could Mabel Harcourt have heard them, would have lessened by a good deal her regret at leaving Braeton. Pretty Miss Brown, at Ivy Cottage, thought it was a decided take-in, and loudly intimated that when *she* got married, the wreaths, and veils, and dresses shouldn't be bought for nothing, but the whole village should get to know of it in a suitable manner, and be present to see how she conducted herself at the ceremony. Miss Tim was very indignant, and called round that very night at Mrs. Sharrup's to unbosom herself on the subject. What did people get engaged and proposed to, and courted and married, and have their little quarrels for, she should like to know, if it wasn't that other people might discuss them and take warning? For *her* part, she had no patience with things being done in a corner; just as if there was something amiss that the whole world wasn't wanted to know; and it wasn't quite clear to her mind, in fact she

had heard something like a whisper, or at least it was just hinted, that somebody had thought it was possible that every thing wasn't quite,—or if it hadn't got so far as that, there was room enough for anybody to think, if they were disposed to express their opinion; but she was thankful to say she wasn't one of those people who trouble themselves with other folk's concerns, and make unpleasantnesses about little matters; only, for her part, she sincerely hoped and trusted things would turn out better than she expected from such a beginning; and she was sure Mrs. Philip Lowe had her best wishes, her *very* best wishes—only it would have been more satisfactory, &c. &c. &c. And having concluded this most remote approximation to a definite hypothesis, Miss Tim descended to specialities; inquired if Miss Julia Sharrup had heard what the dresses were like, was there a pretty set out at the breakfast, did the bride go off in good spirits—together with other little matters of feminine curiosity.

“So t'other poor bairn's left wi' herself, wi' nobody to speak a kind word to her, or cheer her up a bit for them as is gone, and won't never

come back to her any more," said Mrs. Brant, who had taken her knitting and gone down the village to have a "crack," as she called it, with Polly Benn. "Ay, marry, some folks gets sweet and ither folks gets sour i' this here world, an' there's allers a contrairy halving o' t' lot, as my good man used to say when he turned t' crusty end o' t' loaf my side."

Polly Benn had had a hard day's washing, a very hard day indeed. It had been one of those nasty, perverse, provoking October days, denominated by washerwomen "clarty," when things seem to be possessed of an obstinate determination not to dry; and after hanging out in back yards for two, three, four, or five hours, flap their wet draperies in your face, in just about as promising a state of forwardness as when they emerged from the washing-tub:—days when there is no wind, no sunshine, no anything but damp and smits; days when the smoke comes down the kitchen chimney, and the fire wont "draw," when the powder blue "sets" in the starch things, and coloured articles go "streaky" with having to be dried by the fire. And of all days again, this was

the one selected by Mrs. Herman Kaye to send down three pairs of her best linen sheets, with strict injunctions that they were to be washed, folded, mangled, ironed, aired, and sent back by next evening at the latest. Two pairs were already dried and laid out on the dresser, having been all day going through the process; the others were hanging up now on the great clothes horse before the fire, forming a capacious screen, in one corner of which Matthew sat huddled up into the smallest possible compass, shrinking instinctively into the back-ground every time his better half hove in sight; being impressed with the feeling that he was very much in somebody's way, and yet not having the slightest idea where to put himself, so as to be out of it. Polly was standing behind her tub in the back kitchen, a tallow candle stuck in a bottle set up on one side of it, and a saucer to hold her soap on the other. There was a look of intense disgust on her face, as she plunged her red arms into the seething surge of suds, and a vigorous impatience in her manner of twitching about the unfortunate linen entrusted to her tender mercies, which intimated that her

temper was in that critical state stigmatised as "touchy."

"Some folks gets sour, does they? Well, I reckon they does, myself, I don't know as ever I got aught else. Sugar's all sunk down to t' bottom of t'cup, leastways I han't never lighted on a taste yet, an' I'se been suppin' at it these good many years back. Miss Maud, bless her, got her's at top, but tak' my word on't, it 'll be sweetened for her agin afore long. Why, marry, yon face of her's 'ud turn vinegar into new milk afore she looked at it. And so t'other Miss has been an' gone an' got married. Well, she'll rue on't, that's all. I sure I don't know what folks gets married for now-a-days; catch me goin' for to do it agin if once I got loosened from yon old man."

"Hush, Polly, you'll hurt his feelins."

"Feelins'! he ain't got no feelins' as ivver I herd tell on, let alone a feelin for draughts an blasts o' wind. He's no call to be round under a body's feet on a washing day; an' when Mrs. Kaye, bad luck to her, sent me them sheets this morning, I says to him, 'Matthy,' says I, 'you just stop a-bed

to-day, an' I'll see to it yer gits yer vittles reg'lar; there aren't no place for the likes o' you when folks is busy.' But, bless you, Mrs. Brant, I hadn't hardly got turned round and fairly set at my tub, but down he comes hobblin' and wheezin', and lookin' out for a comfortable place, an' yonder he's been ever since, screwed up inside yon winter-edge, takin' care on hisself an' his feelins. Did ye go to see t' young leddy wed?"

"Marry, no, weddins ain't no sort o' count to me; but I sent Sally round to fetch a ounce of pepper, an' t' saxton tell'd her they was just a comin' out o' church, so she went inside t' door an' see'd 'em. She said they looked fine an' menseful; she was i' white silk, wi' summit soft and glowerin' like fallin' over it, an' t' beautifullest flowers she ever set eyes on droppin' down in front. An' Miss Maud, bless her, looked just like a angel. Sally said as how she couldn't tak' tent of ought she'd got on, her face looked so sweet like, just as if she were a waitin' for summit to come an' fetch her away. Our Sally were quite upset wi' it, an set on a cryin', and then wi' takin' out her handkersher that was lyin' nigh t'

pepper, it made her start o' sneezin', an she were forced to come out afore she'd fairly see'd it all. But, she said, it were rare an' fine, nobbut Mr. Lowe, that's him, you know, had sich a stiff look wi' him, an' seemed so awful grand."

"Ay, she's gotten her master at last. It does some folks good to get mastered. *I never was, never.* He's no sort o' thing to look up to, isn't yon," and Polly took her fingers out of the suds and pointed over her shoulder towards the clothes horse. "I kind, o' missed that out about honour-in' an' obeyin', when I got wed. 'Tain't everybody as the likes o' *me* can obey; an' he's sattled down wi' that now, and nivver thinks o' tellin' me to do ought as I haven't a mind to. Here you, Matthy," she said, wringing the suds off her arms and striding into the front kitchen, to turn the sheets; "just you side out somewhere else, an' don't be keepin' t' fire from these here."

Matthew picked himself up, and shifted himself vaguely into the middle of the kitchen, looking round for a vacant place, with an air of helpless resignation that was very edifying to behold.

"Ain't ye a bit sore upon him whiles, Mrs.

Benn? Ye see it kind o' skeers him like, when ye get so angry, an' makes him as he can't help hisself."

"Law! Mrs. Brant, bless ye, I ain't angry. I nobbut *speaks loud*. It ain't no sort o' yield being angry with 't' likes of *him*; he just stands starin' at ye, an' takes it kind o' daft. When I gets *rail* angry I doesn't speak, I *looks*, and then he knows summut's a comin', an' clears out straight-away. There's a vast deal in a look. I kind o' speaks loud fifty times a day, I've gotten trained up wi' it, and a body can't help that. Now, Matthy, ye can come back an' fix yerself in this here corner."

Matthew came back and fixed himself.

"I don't know but what I *is* kind o' cross whiles with him," she said, going back again to her tub, and giving a sort of deprecatory glance before she re-commenced her washing, to where Matthew was endeavouring to shake himself down again, inside the clothes' horse, "but it goes agin one's senses that I should stan' here, washin' while my back fairly aches, an' then manglin' while my arms—an' they're stout uns too,—ain't

got no sort o' spring in 'em worth mentionin', an' then ironin', while t' patience is nigh broiled out on me, wi' fidgetin' over them starch things, an' then t' work isn't done, but I mun pack 'em up, an' go trailing of 'em down t' village back agin to Mrs. Kaye's, when t' rest o' folks is snug a-bed, or sattled down to a bit o' rest at fireside, an' mebbly not get paid for 'em after all, but telled I mun just wait while Missis gets right change; an' *him* there, Mrs. Brant, sittin' like a mop handle i' the chimbly corner, wi' no thought o' nowt but to keep hisself from t' draught, an' axin' when t' dinner 'll be fit. I say, if that ain't enough to rile a body, an' mak'em speak a bit loud whiles, why, I don't see why folk's tongues was given 'em at all. Just tak' tent on it now, an' him promisin' when we was wed to *keep* me, and give me his worldly goods, when he know'd all t' while he hadn't none to give, let alone me havin' to take my bit o' money out o' t' bank to buy summut to mak' t' cottage look dacent, afore we put our heads intull it. If he don't keep *his* words, there ain't no sort o' reason as I should go for to stick to mine about honourin' an' obeyin'. Sure, I

don't know what folks gets married for, t' ain't been no sort o' luck to me as I ever see'd. But dear Miss Maud, bless her, to think of her lookin' so beautiful an' sweet, wi' trouble at her heart as she has."

"Mrs. Benn, it ain't no ways clear to me, but what she kind o' sees him round her in a sort o' way. She's had a strange like look wi' her eyes ever sin' t' dear master was took, as if she was a seein' summut as other folks couldn't. It's allers been on my mind that some people has *visions*, kind o' dreams ye see, as makes them peaceful an' sweet like. I sure if t' angels has faces at all, an' I hope they have, they'll be summut like Miss Maud's, wi' sich a shine an' glint. I hope t' other young leddy 'll do well wi' this strange gentleman. I don't much matter folks myself as looks so proud and stiff upright; but some likes one thing an' some another, and there ain't no tellin' what suits. Nobbut she loves him, they'll get along somehow nor other."

"An' she does that, Mrs. Brant, my word on it. It ain't on my track to go peepin' and spryin'

round of other folk's faces ; but it goes hard if she ain't been a thinkin' on him this good bit past. Ye mind that Sunday mornin' he preached here October was a year, why, she ain't been t' same ever since, she's gotten a new way wi' her, kind o' sweet like at times, just t' same as came over her aunt Miss Miriam, and she was awful proud, ye mind, when she was goin' to be wed to yon gentleman from the west country. Poor thing, an' she got took afore it come about ; but that's neither here nor there. An' I've see'd as clear as ever I see'd anything, that Miss Mabel were goin' along t' same track."

"I know what it is, Mrs. Brant," continued Polly, stripping the suds from her arms, and giving a flying glance across to Matthew, who was snoring behind the clothes' horse ; and then looking hard and fast at the tallow candle standing in its glass bottle on her tub corner. "I know what it is, Mrs. Brant. I know t' time when I was nigh hand gettin' t' same sort o' thing myself, afore I took up wi' *him*, when Mark Ranner, bodkin Mark they used to call him, 'cause he was so small like,

lived parish schoolmaster here. I could ha' lifted him up in yon clothes' basket, he was nobbut such a little un, but there was a vast o' summut in him as made folks take a good bit o' time to consider afore they did ought to cross him, an' he had a sort o' way wi' him just like a prince, as nobody dare go agin. And he kind o' made me feel as humble and gentle like, and we was a goin' to be wed. And I mind as well as can be, I read it all through in t' Prayer-book a month afore t' day, an' when I came to that piece about obeyin', I kind o' stuck fast for a minnit, for ye see I'd never said that to no person. Well, next day it were Sunday, an' my missis allers let him come home wi' me from church of a Sunday night, an' we had a bit of a joke about this here obeyin', an' I said I warn't goin' for to do it, and from jokin' we got to jawin' about it, an' I flew high, an' so did he, for he'd a awful deal o' pride, only he kept it so quiet like. An' I kept gettin' hotter an' hotter, while I said he might go an' take back word about t' banns, for they was goin' to be axed t' next Sunday. An' wi' that he gave me a long

look—I've never had but one look like that in all my born days, Mrs. Brant—an' he says, as kind-like, 'Do ye *mean* it, Polly?' and I flung out at him agin, for I was kind o' riled wi' his quietness, an' I tell'd him I never said nowt as I didn't mean, and left him, for we'd just gotten to t' back door, an' missis didn't let followers come into t' kitchen. I've oft thought since, if he'd had chance to ha' comed in, we'd ha' got it made up; but servant gals' troubles ain't no sort o' count wi' missises, an' he were forced to go. An' t' next thing I heerd on him he were gone from t' village back away to t' moors, an' I've never heerd tell on him since. So then I took up wi' yon. He was kind o' soft like, and had no sort o' say of his own; but I didn't care who it was, so long as I got somebody to let t' village folks see I hadn't cared for Mark. But law, Mrs. Brant, he ain't nothing at all to stick to. Folks ought to look out for a sweet bone when they 're goin' to be pickin' at it all their lives, but I've got t' sweetness out o' mine a good bit past, though I never telled no one afore you."

When Mrs. Brant had packed up her knitting

and gone, Polly looked down into her washing tub, and let a tear or two drop into the suds. Then she wrung the sheets out, hung them up at the fire to dry, and set on a pan of gruel for Matthew's supper.

CHAPTER X.

Elverton Rectory, January 6th. — How many weeks have passed since I wrote anything in this book, — so many that autumn leaves have drifted quite away, and the snows of winter lie whitely upon the lawn, and on the church roof, and on that little row of cottages close by the churchyard, and on the uplands and meadows round us, and on this great mountain which looks down on Elverton village; while in the long still evenings we sit together, Philip and I, in this warm study, not reading, nor working, nor writing; but just thinking hand in hand, and heart to heart, of how good God has been to us.

For we are very happy. Philip does not pet me much. I think nobody ever could do that; and he does not pour out upon me, either, a

whole dictionary full of pretty names and endearing words; I can do without them. We want no caresses, no fine speeches, so long as we can look steady and true into the eyes of those we love, and find there nothing but love again — a brave, earnest, unflinching love for us, and for us alone, to be our joy and crown through life. And this is what I find day by day—nothing else but this.

We had a very quiet wedding, Philip and I, — how I like to write those three little words—a very quiet one indeed, for Maud's sake. Very early that bright October morning, while the blue mist lay over Lingold Lake, and crept in and out among the woods, and while the sunshine flashed upon the dew-drops, and glanced upon the crimson leaves, and warmed the old grey church tower, we set off, papa, and Maud, and I. Philip and his friend were standing at the altar waiting for us—he with just the same steady, composed look I had learned to know so well, and to rest upon. There was not a creature in the church besides our own party, for we had taken care the day should not be known, and everything was so hushed and silent. Then the clergyman began.

At first, I had no thoughts of any one but Philip; but by and by they reached to Maud too, standing by me. For when I turned and gave her my flowers to hold, there was a look of such high, commanding peace on her face,—such an almost regal expression of self-containment and repose, with a strange glory in her eyes, as though, looking upward to things hidden from us, they saw that coming time when for her too, as for me then, should be realised the great hope of life. And when all was over, and Mr. Eden had said over me and Philip the solemn words — “Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder,” it seemed to me that in the sight of Him who seeth things eternal and invisible they were said over others, and for others, than for us two — even over Stephen Roden and Maud. For he was there watching us, standing very near us. I knew it so, and Maud knew it too.

Mr. Lowe had asked me many times where I would like to go for our wedding journey. Mamma thought Scotland; papa, whose thoughts always turn in a literary direction, would have sent me into Germany; to Leipsic and Weimar.

Where should we go, though, but to the place where we first met; where those grand old sweeping cliffs smile under the blue sky; where the ruined castle keeps watch upon its rocky eyrie; where the waves come swinging and flashing and sparkling on smooth, far-reaching sands. So to Scarbro' we went; to the north cliff again; not to the same house though; but to a quiet little cottage towards Scalby, far away beyond the other streets and crescents, where a steep, winding path led us down the cliff just opposite that long low range of rocks we both of us remember so well.

Yes, both of us. For I like to think that he remembers all these things as well as I do. We were there two Sundays. The first of them we went to the old parish church, the same we had gone to, not together though, last year. We started very early, that we might walk about in the churchyard before the service began. We went to see Anne Brontë's grave again—there, nearly under the shadow of the old castle; and listened as we stood by it, to the low, restless murmur of the waves, so like the wail of her own

sad, sorrow-laden life. Turning to go down towards another part, we found a grave marked out among all the others by a peculiar white-veined ivy, which wound over and interlaced the hillock. There was no headstone, no inscription of any sort, nothing but just a narrow ledge of granite all round to preserve the earth from falling away. It looked green, and fresh, and beautiful among the monotonous range of upright stones, as though belonging to one who even in death would be remembered by Nature rather than Art. There was something so pleasant in the look of that green and clasping ivy. Passing it, we asked the sexton's wife, who was standing near, to whom it belonged. She appeared to be a woman very fond of talking, and gave us the whole history. Let me write it down, just as she told it. It kept us standing there, over that ivy-bound hillock, with trembling hands, and eyes full of tears, long after the bells had ceased to chime, and the Psalms begun to peal out through the old church walls.

“It was a lady, ma'am, as came unfortently to her end, nigh upon a twelvemonth past. She

was uncommon beautiful, ma'am, more pity for her, for them sort o' folks is always more unfortent than anybody else, some way nor other; and she'd a vast o' what they call *janius*, not as I know much about what it means, but happen you may. She was stoppin' away up yonder, ma'am," and the woman pointed to the north shore, "and folks used to stare at her whenever she put her head out o' doors, she was so mighty handsome. An' she were a kind like sort o' lady too, ma'am. I've seen her myself catch little children up on t' sands, and kiss 'em, just for all t' world as if she belonged to 'em, and onybody that she saw lookin' kind o' miserable, she would make up to 'em, and get out of 'em what was t' matter, an' try to cheer 'em up. I can tell of her comin' to me once when my master was laid ill, an' I thought for nothing but what he was goin' to die; an' she brought me a lot o' things for him—sick folks fancies anything, you know, ma'am, that a stranger brings—and she talked to me whiles wi' a kind like sort o' tone, though I couldn't make much sense on it, it was so different to what the trac' lady says when *she* comes round; but I

mind when I telled her I was feared master would die and leave me a lone widdy, that she looked at me wi' a glowering look, an' said as there was things a vast worse than being left a widdy, and then she turned white like, and went away; for our kitchen's mighty grewsome and close, odd times, with getting so little air and t' chimney reeks fit to stew a body alive.

"Well, after that, ma'am," and the woman set her arms a-kimbo, and went on in a cool business-like way, tapping the granite ledge of the grave with her thick-soled boots, "after that, a gentleman came from furrin parts, and stopped in t' same house. I can't tell exact where he was from, but he was nobbut young, and his wife wasn't long dead. A very book-learned man, ma'am, and the beautifulest singer you ever heerd. I mind o' standin' behind him at church one Sunday when they was singin' t' Old Hundred, an' it kind o' made me creep all over, it was so solemn, an' had such a lot o' tune in it. Well, as I telled you, he was stoppin' in t' same house; ye see folks meets so promiscus in company places like this, and I heerd tell as how she'd knowed

him afore, not as there was any harm in that, for he was as likely a gentleman as ever I set eyes upon, and gived me a shilling, and sometimes half a crown, every time I put him into a pew at church; but somehow she took low after he came, at least so folks said, but folks says anything now-a-days, and I never reckon nought o' what I hears, but anyway, by account of that or summut else, she pined like and went off sudden at last."

"Do you mean she died?" said Philip.

"Yes, sir, that was it; an' she was took afore any of her kin could be got to see her. It always was very strong in my mind, ma'am, that she helped herself off wi' summut as she took, for you see she was that sort of lady that would be desperate if she was riled up to it, and it's noways clear to me but what—but that's neither here nor there, and I never mentioned it to nobody afore—dead folks is best left to rest, and I wouldn't go for to say that she wasn't took natural—but folks *thinks*, you know, ma'am, they can't help *that*. Well, her husband came down from London and had her buried, and then set off

back wi' t' little boy; and t' strange gentleman—I can't mind his name now—set this here plant upon t' place, and telled me to keep it trimmed up tidy like."

"And what was her name?" said I, drawing closer to Philip, for a strange, cold feeling came over me.

"Law now, ma'am! to think that I shouldn't ha' told you that afore. They called her Tresilis, ma'am. Mrs. Tresilis, an onhandy sort o' name, it was a long time afore I could tongue it myself, but bless you, ma'am, we gets lots o' queer names up here; folks comes from all parts to get the sea air, some on 'em more dead than alive, and after they've been a bit and got coddled up and wheeled about in basket carriages, and stuffed wi' all sorts o' medicine, they just die straight out and come into this churchyard to be buried. I've made a sight o' money some seasons, ma'am, wi' nought but funerals; folks likes to give handsome at such times. If you go round to t' other part o' t' yard, you'll see some fine monuments, ma'am, one wi' a bunch o' stone lilies broken off, as nat'ral as life, for a young lady as was brought

here to get well, and died the day after. She was nigh upon being married to a gentleman down south; and we've got another, ma'am, a sweet thing in white marble for a young baby as was drowned bathing,—them sort o' things will happen odd times,—with a pair of little angels at top, just gettin' ready to fly away. Most folks cry as sees it, ma'am, it's reckoned to be so touchin' like, but I never see'd any angels myself, so I don't know what they ought to be like. And then, ma'am, as you seem kind of interested in the place, I could tell you of another lady from France, as came to these parts and died sudden. We've lots o' them sort o' things happens here every year, ma'am."

We thanked her, but said we had heard enough for that morning; so she left us and bustled off into church to show the people into their pews. Philip and I stood by the grave a long time, speaking no word. Then we turned and went in together to the service. They were just singing the last verse in the Benedictus:—

"To give light to them that sit in darkness and

the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."

I could but remember the look of weariness and longing upon her face, when in that same old church, but little more than a year ago, we three had listened to that Psalm together. It was too late to pray for her now; we could only think of her reverently, mournfully, lovingly; and thank God, in our heart of hearts, that from such stormy billows as those through which she had battled we were in mercy spared. And when in our solemn Litany the prayer went up for "all who have erred and are deceived," we bowed our faces, and said Amen.

When we came out of church, I asked the woman when Mrs. Tresilis had died. She said on Sunday the tenth of October, last year, some time in the afternoon, as near as she could remember. The same day, the same hour, that Philip and I were standing on the little bridge on Lingold Lake. We each of us gathered a leaf from her grave; and as there is no other mourner to weep for her, I have taken her memory into my heart, to hold it there faithfully, reverently, tenderly.

I have been at home, my own home, nearly three months now. The trees round the Rectory garden, one mass of crimson, brown, and gold when I came, are each and all tipped and veiled with snow—the new year's snow. Philip and I had our watchnight alone together by the study fire—brighter than the one before it, thank God! And as the new year came in, we received it thankfully, prayerfully, knowing that whatever it might bring us, there could be nothing but peace, so long as our hearts were in the right place.

How much more I should like to write! but I am a wife now, and I have many things to do. Philip likes every one about him to be at work, so he gives me plenty to do in the daytime. Only at night, when he comes home from his visiting, when the twilight draws on and the sun has gone down behind Scorton Fell, he makes me put it all away, and we sit together over the fire; he in his great easy chair, and I on a stool beside him, with my head resting on his shoulder, just as we sat five months ago in the room at Braeton.

I am very happy then.

Life is more precious to me than it used to be.

I am learning to think of it now as a thing very earnestly to be tended and cared for. It seems to me so infinitely holy, as if so much might be made of it. I want to rise to the whole altitude of my nature, to grow out and blossom on all sides under the beautiful sunshine of divine and human love. Ah! I remember the time when life for me seemed but a thing to be patiently endured—now it is instinct with all joy; and I glory in the thought that it can never end, that it will go on widening and brightening for ever.

“ 'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant,
More life, and fuller, that we want!”

And I like to think that my life, all that is noblest and best of it, may come to its perfect growth even here, in this quiet little village home. I used to weary once for some great thing to do, something that might win me name and fame. I see now that in the work God gives us to do there is no high, no low, save as we make it such by our performance of it; that in His sphere of duty there is neither great nor small, neither

mean nor honourable; but all lies level and equal before that one touchstone of worthiness, "Ye did it unto me." I have learned now that when once the seal of consecration is placed upon us, God accepts what we in our pride and foolishness think the most trivial duties of life as part of our religion, seeing in all of them the spirit of love to Him, and viewing them as outgrowths of that new, divine life which He has given us. And so in this home quietness of mine, apart from all that the world calls great or noble, from all that once I longed to be and to do, I may be fathoming the great deeps, and looking out over the infinite scope, and learning all the meaning which lies within this strangely beautiful life of ours.

"And this is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

CHAPTER XI.

ONCE more at Braeton the new year came dancing in.

There was gaiety for those who liked it that night. Mrs. Herman Kaye was having a ball and supper party, at which Mr. Sparks, the new Mossingay agent, was flourishing away in a dress suit and white kids; making sad havock among the hearts of the susceptible belles of the neighbourhood, who unanimously voted him a charming gentleman; so exceeding polite and elegant in his manners, such a sweet dancer, such an engaging partner, such a perfect contrast to that poor Mr. Roden, who got killed last summer up in the north, and seemed as if he couldn't do anything but his duty. Warm floods of rosy light came eddying through the crimson curtains

of Sir Everard Albyn's dancing-room, with wafts of music and quick pattering of footsteps which told of revelry and mirth within. Mossingay Castle was one blaze of light, gleaming from all its lofty windows, down through the leafless branches of the trees, and over the heathery slopes around. For those, too, who possessed not the *entrée* to the glittering circle of Braeton aristocracy, pretty Miss Brown opened her best parlour, and set out her best supper things, and had the best candlesticks rubbed bright, and prepared as merry a valediction as she could for the year that had passed so lightly over her. And any one going past the newly thatched and whitewashed "Albyn Arms" on Braeton village green, might have perceived a fragrant odour of tobacco smoke and home-brewed ale; or, peeping through the clasping ivy branches into the low latticed casements, where the blinds were drawn up and the curtains put back, he might have seen an interesting picture of some forty or fifty village lads and lasses, in clean smock frocks and smart new calico dresses, footing it away with true British energy, to the inspiring strains of three

fiddles and a pair of triangles; while comely matrons in their holiday attire, and sturdy stalwart labourers, whose dancing days were over, sat on benches round the walls, laughing to see the flirtations that were going on among the younger ones, and beating time to the rustic music. No one cared to listen to the church bells which were ringing December out, as they always did, with a faint, quavering, not unpleasant sound; nor to think of that tall old black yew-tree which grew by the west window, and was even now wringing its long arms drearily to and fro over the grave where Stephen Roden and little Walter lay sleeping side by side; nor to hear the wind as it came slowly sighing up through the orchard boughs, and eddying round the gables of Braeton Lodge.

Except Maud.

For it was the time when those who have anything to remember sit down quietly and remember it; and those who live only in the present, and from without, bethink themselves how most elegantly or merrily to dance away the hours. The time when all, whether of joy

or sorrow, comes back very freshly to us, and old graves, which we had thought long ago grown over with the tall grass of time and forgetfulness, look out upon us clear and painful again. So, from its hiding-place among the tangled flowers and thick green leafy woods of last June time, came the memory of Maud's grief, and looked her in the face just as freshly, just as vividly, as it had done that long ago summer morning when she first wakened up to it.

There is no forgetting of any sorrow that has cut away from us our whole past life, and left it lying a shapeless and withered thing, in the track of the old year. There is no stifling of Memory, no singing of her to sleep with any lullaby which heaven or earth can give. All that we can do, all that God asks us to do, is to be patient, to dry up the tears one by one as they come, so that they may not blind us for daily duties or daily cares, nor hinder us from looking out, be it ever so faintly and feebly, to that glorious coming time when He shall show us the wherefore of all that so perplexes us here. No sorrow was ever meant to be forgotten, but

rather remembered and spoken with as a friend; that little by little, learning to look upon it as a grave and tender monitor, it may read out to us the heavenly message it has brought from Him who sent it.

Maud was sitting in the low rocking chair before the dining-room fire, just as she had sat there last December night; now for the first time alone. Everything was just the same as it had been a year ago. Canova's nymph looked down in still white beauty from its carved pedestal; the Parian vase, too, in the dim recess, with the sculptured doves stooping down upon its brim. The firelight, flickering out from beneath the white marble mantelpiece, cast its changeful shadows upon the landscape pictures; the same quaint old family portraits in bygone costume and powdered hair, which Mrs. Harcourt was so proud of; on the same scroll-work paper, with its arabesque tracery and graceful curves. With just the same eerie whistle, the wind crept round and round, and through and through the old beech-tree at the bottom of the garden, and then eddied in through the bay window, and

stirred the long heavy dark green curtains, and moved the shadows that lay among their folds. And the same sounds too. The long bare jasmine branches beating against the window, the measured tick of the old clock in the hall, the leaping and crackling of the flames. Everything just the same, only that Mabel dreamed no more with shut eyes and hushed proud face upon the sofa; and that the little nest, the warm-lined mossy nest, had been taken away from the Parian vase, to be more sadly, more reverently treasured up; and that Maud, leaning back in the rocking-chair, and looking out into the flickering firelight, had lost the pleasant child smile from her face, and the bright quick glinting of hope from her grey eyes; and her hands, those little hands that used to be so instinct with busy usefulness, or so peaceful in their repose, had learned to fold themselves now in a passive patient weariness, that was very touching to see.

It was a strange fancy of Maud's to be alone that night; to watch out the dreary, trickling, last life-drops of the old year that had brought

her so much sorrow; to look once again with unwavering eyes upon the bitter story of the past, when she might have slept it quietly away, and let the hours die out with no word of farewell. And yet, sometimes, we like to be thoroughly alone with our griefs, to look them through and through, to talk with them face to face. They are not so keen when we know them better; something of love and yearning looks at us from them, and we come back again to the careless, working world, sadder, perhaps, but wiser, much wiser. Nay, even sometimes, in that long, long look, we find a strange beauty in them, that makes us not afraid to come again and hold them closer to us.

Maud had her writing-desk open on the table beside her; the old silver-bound writing-desk that her aunt Miriam had given her many years ago, when she was a very little girl. She could remember yet the quick springing joy that came into her heart when first that desk was hers; how over and over again she had locked and unlocked it, and stood over it

with such child-like delight, examining its purple velvet covered lids, and cosy little drawers and wafer-boxes, its ebony pens and silver-tipped inkstands, and snowy store of writing paper. And then in later years, how it had become the receptacle of her girlish fancies, of wild dreamy thoughts that she had written down and hidden away there, where no one else might see them. Later still, she had sat before it for many a long pleasant hour, writing out stories and preparing lessons for her Sunday school; and dreaming dreams, perhaps, of some time to come, when she might write that which other than simple village children might think it worth their while to read. Then, too, when all those dreams had passed away, and a new joy, brighter than any they could have given her, had dawned, she sat and penned the first letter she ever sent to Stephen Roden, that week when he was away at the Duke of Chartermayne's estate in Wales.

What a tiny letter it was! yet how long it took her to write it,—Maud's first love-letter.

How well she remembered sitting before her desk that July evening, with her head leaning upon her hand, thinking what she must say; how best she could tell him enough, yet not too much, of all that was in her heart; how many sheets of paper she tore up and threw away before the right words came, and even then how poor they seemed; how tame and powerless, from the thoughts which had tried to shape them! It lay there before her now, that first letter she ever wrote to Stephen Roden; so lovingly treasured up by him in that sacred office drawer at Mossingay cottage, until, when he could look upon it no longer, her hands had taken it thence and brought it back again, — a quiet little memento of that first bright summer time of her young life.

And side by side with it lay his letters; only two or three of them, for they had not often been parted, and then but for a little while. She would never wait for any other letters as she had waited for those, never treasure any others up with such tender-like care. How well she knew the strong, firm, writing, so like

the hand that traced it, the hand that was to have been her stay and support all through life. She read them over one by one,—those brave, honest, innocent letters, that she had once been so proud to read; that even now were full of such pleasant memories,—then folded and laid them by with that reverence which we love to give to those who have passed away far beyond the reach of anything else we can do for them. After that,—for to-night, Maud would call back the whole of that past time, and speak with it heart to heart,—she took out Stephen's rose, the June rose he had reached down for her to look at that morning he went away; with its little crimson streak of hope, never to widen any more, never to be anything else but a streak, a faint, unfinished, broken promise of beauty.

And was this indeed all? Was this pitiful little bud, with its young petals fast bound up, and shrivelling away before even they had seen the sun, to be indeed the type of her own life? While others went forth to new homes, and smiled upon new friends, and gathered to themselves

new hopes and interests, was her life to be nothing but a memory? Was all that great, wide future, that she had looked out into only a year ago to-night, so very bright and glowing in the promise it gave her, to wither up like this poor little dead rose-bud, colourless, senseless, shapeless, with no beauty that any one should desire it? God forgive her, that, as she thought of it, the whole bitterness came back upon her; and, as in that first waking up to the great grief of her life, she said, "It is too hard for me."

Ah, we cling so to happiness! We long so earnestly after it; we cry out like spoiled children for the beautiful flowers which a wiser hand than ours has gathered and laid away out of our sight. We look so very bitterly, and alas! often so very murmuringly, upon the empty place of our dead hope, and bewail ourselves as though some strange thing had happened to us; while all the time that dead hope or dead friend is looking down upon us from heaven, trying to beguile us from its empty grave here, and train our eyes upward to a new resting-place. We are so slow to learn that all grief is but for a little while,

and does but set our feet upon a surer track for Heaven.

For after all, Maud was no philosopher. She had not learned yet, as some master-spirits have, to say to all manner of human happiness, "I have no need of thee." She was but a simple, unlearned girl, a child almost in her knowledge of trouble, until this first great grief had come, and with its rough but wholesome touch opened the eyes of her soul to know how wide and serious, and oftentimes painful a thing is this life of ours. And even yet, that vision was not quite clear. It takes us long to accustom our eyes to a new light; we must be content at first to see men as trees walking, to have only a vague indistinct consciousness of the new world wherein the sight-giving touch of grief has placed us. By and by it will become more clear; then we shall tread with steadier step, and learn to be thankful for the "open vision," though it be not always of things joyful.

But Maud had the one thing needful, which many a master-spirit lacks. She knelt and prayed.

The moments rolled on ; the old year hastened to its close.

Gaily from the ducal galleries of Mossingay, and from the silken curtained drawing-rooms of Sir Everard Albyn's stately home, the tides of music floated. Still from the latticed windows of the village inn the warm light danced out through the clustering ivy leaves, and lay upon the quiet street, while quick, pattering footsteps were heard within, and gay ringing laughter as the jest went round. The old yew-tree swayed its long arms drearily to and fro upon the grave by the west window ; the wind came sighing up the orchard boughs and whistling through the old beech tree's leafless branches. Sadly, slowly, solemnly, the church bells gave their farewell to the dying year, and then paused for silence until it was gone. And still Maud knelt and prayed. Prayed there in that same room, where, twelve months ago, she only dreamed. Shall we mourn over anything which turns our dreams to prayers?

Ere she arose, a feeling of infinite rest had dawned upon her ; a strange, new consciousness of life ; a hope which overpassed all bounds of

sense, and anchored firmly and for ever on that coming time when the former things should have passed away, and joy, fulness of joy, be hers. In those still moments of prayer, the bitterness of death had passed for ever. After that, Maud's sorrow was a conquered sorrow. The dawn of the new year brought with it for her a very sweet and lasting peace, such a peace as is given only for the price of tears. Looking her grief face to face, as indeed she must always do to the end of time—for there could be no forgetfulness of that—it began to wear a new and quiet expression, awing her no more, nor filling her with terror as once it had done, but walking side by side with her, quietly and gently, wearing no front of gloom, only a grave, sweet stateliness.

There is a sort of crisis in the indulgence of any grief, beyond which, if we go, it gets the mastery over us, and claims for itself, all through the rest of our life, the tribute of an incessant and bitter remembrance. Maud had mercifully been stayed short of this. She had learned, before a morbid brooding over her grief became habitual, to look above and beyond it;

to take life as it was given to her, no longer glad or golden; and love it, not as for her own good entirely, but for others. Ah! how many there are who do live such a life — men and women of whom the world is not worthy; who, having slowly and painfully watched the putting away from them of all that we call happiness, do yet go out among their fellows full of sympathy and loving-kindness, with tender words for those who suffer, and with answering smiles for those to whom the sunshine of hope is yet unclouded. Henceforth Maud Harcourt was to be one of these.

Truly it had been a hard lesson to learn, this divine self-abnegation, — most lessons are so that teach us more of life and more of our own hearts. Perhaps very often, whilst we are comforting ourselves in our little passing sorrows by the sympathy of those we love, we forget to think how hardly they have acquired that gentle art; how very rude and rugged the steps may have been which led them up to those calm heights from which they now reach down a helping hand to us on the lower beaten track of common life. We

watched them toiling up the steep ascent, and saw the scars they bore, with a "poor thing" sort of pity, easily expressed and soon forgotten; and, now that they have reached the mountain top, where the scars are healed and the weary feet at rest, we take the flowers they let fall upon us, and comfort ourselves with their pleasant fragrance, never thinking how they learned to gather them. Ah! we are very selfish! Well is it for these shining ones who walk above us, perfect through suffering, that they have learned to live, not for our gratitude, but for our weal!

It was because this lesson had only just been learned, and the strain of it still tightening upon her, that Maud, sitting there in the creeping, glinting fire-twilight, felt a sort of loneliness come over her. Look at it as she might, life could never again be to her what it used to be, and she could not, without a little wrench, say good-bye to what had once been a great hope and gladness to her. She could no longer tread with just so light a step the beaten path of daily cares and duties, or sustain with just so steady a voice

that melody of pleasant tempers and gentle words which those around her had listened to so long. True she might have other joys, but never one like this that was past. She might find other new friendships, for kind hearts never live alone ; but none again which should be so close, so firm, so sweet as this. She could never listen again to any voice like his ; she could never lean on any other earthly stay as she had done upon Stephen Roden. Complete though it might be for heaven and heavenly thoughts, and filled to overflowing with the kindest benevolence and the minutest sympathy for others, yet, as regarded that one bygone hope, her life must ever, in a certain sense, be imperfect, lacking the bright glow, the golden hues of joy and fresh upspringing happiness which that year had taken from her for ever.

It was as when some unseen hand snatches away from a painter's pallet its brightest, most vivid colours ; and when he seeks to story out some memory of a gorgeous sunset, or crimsoning morning sky, or purpling landscape, he finds none but sombre tints—beautiful it may be still, and rich and lasting, but not such as will mate

the glories of a cloudland scene, or image forth the glowing pictures of fancy. Henceforth he must be content with quiet skies, the cool grey tones of twilight, the broad shadows of evening, in place of those other pictures he had learned to love so well. So for Maud, the flush of morning was past, and the glow of noon-day. Evening, the time for thought and memory, had drawn on. She might be always peaceful now, thank God! but never joyous, never mirthful again, until life, purged of all painful thoughts, and receiving back, in its heavenly completeness, the hope that had been taken for a season, should be one bright, blissful, eternal now.

And so Maud's new year came in. Not so lightly as the last had done, but with enough of promise yet, lying where no time nor chance could belie it any more, to make her go patiently along in whatever track of duty it might mark out for her; not wearying for the past, nor looking aimlessly forth into the half-lighted future, but just taking each day from God, with so much of rest in it as He chose to give, and so much of the peace which was to stand to her in

the place of joy. Her life henceforth was to be, though very much changed indeed, not wasted, or aimless, or withered. God forbid that any life which He has given us to be used for Him, well and wisely, should ever be so marred by sorrow of His own sending! Not wasted and aimless, then, but cast into a new mould, informed with fresh intelligence, and instinct with fresh energy. Changed, but not destroyed.

And as she thought upon all these things, there came, like a pleasant little stream tracking its silver way along some mist-laden valley or rocky mountain bed, those last spoken words of Stephen Roden:—

“It is only a little while, Maud.”

CHAPTER XII.

Elverton, October 10th.—This is our wedding-day, Philip's and mine; we have been married three years,—long enough for the romance to have gone away, if ever there was any. But I am happier now, a great deal happier, than I was that October fortnight at Scarbro'. I think the years as they pass on draw us closer and closer together, and we learn to understand each other better. It was not easy at first for me, wild and untamed as I used to be, to give in, in everything as I can do now—to bear quietly that tone and gesture of command which Philip so often unconsciously uses, and which people who don't know him think rather harsh and dictatorial. I thought it so once, Philip. I remember yet that long black day, the first winter I came here, when

I would not acknowledge myself to be wrong in that affair of old nurse Margot; and how, by my foolishly standing out about it, there had near been laid between us the foundation stone of discord. I know you better now, Philip. I have learned to honour that firmness, that impatience of injustice, that brave, outspoken truthfulness of yours that I liked so well, one long ago morning on the rocks of Scarbro'; but which I rebelled against when it came too near my own likes and dislikes. I am finding now how much pleasanter it is to be led than to lead, and I joy daily in that rock-like constancy of yours which it is such a rest to lean upon.

How quietly we spend our time here, Philip and I. Those little words have such a music in them, I could say them again and yet again. He is in his study all the morning, writing out his sermons, and correcting the proof sheets of that book of his which is going through the press just now. Sometimes he brings in one for me to look over, as I sit here with my sewing, and I am so proud to do it for him — far prouder than if they were my own; if not, I go and see

my old women in the village, or visit the schools; two things which Mabel Harcourt used to detest, but which Mrs. Philip Lowe finds considerable satisfaction in. Then in the afternoon my husband goes out to see his people, and I sit quietly with my reading, or write up my journal here. That is the duller part of the day to me. Afterwards, in the evening, comes our own hour together. Philip is as jealous as ever of that time; whatever work I have is put away for him then, and we talk over the past, and sometimes dip into the future.

We have known sorrow too. There are some things even in this happy home of ours which are sanctified by death. There is a little grave in the churchyard that I can see from my window. We have an empty cradle, a drawer full of playthings, never used now, but often wet with tears. We have some tiny shoes that she used to wear; a little brown hat and pink pinafore, that I have watched so often glancing about on the lawn, but will never be worn any more. A picture-book too, with the marks of her busy fingers on its pages. These

things are very precious to Philip and me now. Often in our eventide stillness we speak of our little Maud — all that she was, all that she might have been ; until, when we grow sad, we comfort ourselves by remembering what she *is*, and are content, nay, even thankful, to think

“That He whose love exceedeth ours
Hath taken home His child.”

It is not always that we can feel like this, though. Sometimes it is a very painful memory; once it was a very bitter memory. Even yet, when Philip is away, I weary for her very much. I cry out for my darling again.

But I was thinking about her once, and opened my desk to look for a picture that she used to be very fond of. I found, lying close beside it, a white-veined ivy leaf. Then I thanked God that my only one, my child Maud, had been quietly anchored yonder, before any of these things came to her.

Poor Mrs. Tresilis! I have been thinking over again that Scarbro' time—all of it that belonged to her. I often think of her now, and

wish I could pray for her. Ah! I should have done that long ago! I picture to myself the slow dying out of hope from her life; the quick over-mastering tide of remembered love that would quench all other thought when *he* came back again; and how, weary, perhaps, and restless, and despairing of any other quiet, she had wildly hurried herself away into that "great hereafter" of which she spoke. Dying alone, unwept for, that same hour that Philip and I were so happy. And then I read the letter over again that I had once sent to her, and resolved that another time I will work while it is called day. What was it that kept me too from drifting away to those dreary shores of unbelief, and wandering at last without one spark of faith or gladness into the dim shadowy future? There was something alike in our minds, I know there was; what had I deserved more than her, then, that God should send me Philip to lead me on with a gentle hand away from all my doubts, whilst she lived and died with no one to tell her of any of these things? Perhaps if I had spoken kindly to her about them—— But it is over; one

can do nothing for her now, not even pray for her.

I like to think of that long walk over the cliffs at night, when Philip came to meet us, — of his finding me in that cave. I don't call it a lucky thing now, he has taught me better. Next, looking back over my little book, I come to that morning, a good while after, when the letter came to say Mr. Lowe was coming. I have that letter yet, Philip, in my desk, side by side with one of those Lingold autumn leaves, and a single palmy leaf of sea-weed — somewhat withered now — that I once gathered on the rocks with you. The first time I ever saw your handwriting, Philip. What a spot of sunshine that morning was; what a spot of sunshine it is still, though I have known many brighter since! I will not think about the blackness that followed, the utter, despairing hopelessness. Let me rather think of the love that led me through it all to find rest in Heaven, of the patience which gave me time to mend, of the wisdom that taught me humility, and gave me the heart of a little child; such a heart as you have, Philip, though you are so noble and so

firm; for all the experience which taught me that —

“Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And life is perfected by death.”

Maud has been to stay with us since I came here. She is very much altered, very much indeed. I don't call her my “little sister, Maud,” now. There is something so very grand and pure about her, reminding me always of that picture of Dante and Beatrice that I was copying once when Stephen Roden and she sat together in the window. She does not look what I should call happy, but so thoroughly at rest. There is such utter peace upon her face, that fair little face that once used to be so full of glinting hope and sunshine. Maud's future will be very beautiful still, for heaven and for earth, I know it will.

And I have been once, only once, to Braeton since I was married.

Philip exchanged duties with the rector, and we went for a month.

The dear old place is just the same as it used to be; just as full of gossip and innocent, petty scandal. I had been married two years before

ever I saw it again at all. How strange it was to drive through Marbrook streets, and see old names up over the shops! Little Mr. Sharrup, the grocer, was standing behind his plums and sugar bags as usual, and Miss Julia looking out of the drawing-room window. Miss Tim's house, on the Braeton road, had just the same subdued propriety about it, with its drab curtains and dust-coloured blinds, and the ugly little black knocker on the brown door; and Miss Tim, herself, in a stone-coloured dress and grey ribbons, was sitting in the bow window, reading the newspaper. And then to Braeton Lodge, along the well-remembered road, with its overhanging sycamores; and past the orchard and the old beech tree that seemed to smile a welcome to us from every one of its bright green leaves. Dear old Braeton! I used to despise it very much in my proud days, but it is a bonnie little spot, and with as much worth in it, after all, as one finds in most places on this earth.

The village, too, is very little changed. Lizzy Machin is dead, and Martha Brant has taken her cottage close by the church. Poor Martha! we

had a long talk about "the dear Master, bless him, that got took;" she has never given over wearing mourning for him, and speaks of him yet with a softened, reverent tenderness, which tells how deeply the strong manliness of him had wound itself round that rough heart of hers. Polly Bent and Milly Dakin were as flourishing as ever. Polly made me such a series of curtsies when I went into her cottage, that I began to fear she would never regain her balance; and Matthew sat huddled up in the chimney corner, repeating the oscillatory movement, on a smaller and perhaps involuntary scale, with his head. She keeps the same vigilant look-out over him yet, and protects him with a vigorous perseverance that is very amusing.

Miss Gabbatis continues to live in the Tudor Cottage, on the Marbrook road, with a patch of turnips behind, and a bay window with "coloury" curtains in front. She is just the same as ever; wears a brown alpaca dress, and green umbrella, and Dunstable bonnet with a long bow hanging down behind. And she just moves about in the same quick, nimble way, as if she were hung

on invisible springs, and talks in her easy, comical, racy style of things in a general way. She has struck into a new track, however, in one direction, and is writing a book — On the Management of Children. She is to send me a copy when it gets published. She still continues to give lessons to her little maid on “practical objects” at night, when the work is done and the beds are turned down.

I spent two or three long afternoons with Miss Nunly in the old-fashioned house in the Abbey Close at Marbrook. She is very much changed, very much, since I saw her last. Her face has lost that restless, anxious expression which I often used to see upon it, and she looks quiet; but it is a hopeless sort of quietness, as of one who never expects to look upon anything bright again. And there is a monotone of pain in her voice, which it makes one sad to hear. What has been her history? Oh! how often I have wondered! Has she had some great grief like Maud, and not like Maud found the balm for it? or is it something which has long ago poisoned her life; something which nothing can extract, and for which

she cannot even have sympathy? Perhaps there was heart-truth for her in the words which I remember her saying to me one day when we were speaking of Maud, soon after Stephen Roden died :

“My dear, we should never call any grief too hard for us which God sends, and in which there is no sting of self-reproach. It is the sorrow which must be borne in silence and alone, that crushes us.”

Poor Miss Nunly, may her future be brighter than her past has been ! May a time soon come for her when all memory of sadness shall be sweetened and chastened by present rest and sure dawn of hope ! I grieve to think of her, living on alone, all alone, in that old house in the Abbey Close ; listening day after day to the melancholy cawing of the rooks, watching the black elm-tree branches beat against the window, and the Mar roll on its dreary chant past the garden ; and thinking of a life more deeply shadowed, perhaps, than either Maud or I will ever look back upon.

I could fancy sometimes that Maud does not look quite so strong as she used to do. She

lives too earnestly, if it is possible for any one to do that. Every one in the village seems to come to her for advice and sympathy; her mind is never at rest from other people's sorrow. Milly Dakin told me, when I went to see her, that she had been half crazed with that wild son of hers; he used to be getting into all sorts of mischief, and threatened to enlist for a soldier until she got Miss Maud to take him in hand, and since then he has been as gentle as a lamb. And if any of the women get into trouble with their husbands or children, they always come to Maud to make peace. She still keeps up her class on a Wednesday evening, though some of the girls that used to come when I took it for her are grown up and married. Poor Mary Dale, the girl who looked so melancholy after the soldiers came and wheedled John away, has gone to be housemaid with Mamma, instead of Joan, who is married into Marbrook. She is very quiet and steady, and always comes into the dining-room with a low curtsy after there have been letters from Uncle Martin in India, to know if there is going to be any fighting. So

it seems the carpenter's boy has got drafted over there, and taken poor Mary's heart with him. I hope he will come back some of these days and make it all right.

I was saying Maud did not seem quite well. There was a very weary look on her face when she came home from church one Sunday night, just such a look as there used to be on Aunt Miriam's before she began to be ill. When we were at home together, too, I remember she used to take long walks, and spend whole mornings in the lanes and woods about Braeton; but last time I was there she seldom stayed out more than half an hour, and seemed to be tired even with that. I must have her come and stay here next spring; our bracing northern air will revive her, and I am sure this is a healthier place than Braeton. Maud must not leave us.

Who are we, though, that say "must" or "must not" to anything that God holds in His keeping? But so many would miss Maud if she were to go away. She is so bound up in the hearts of the Braeton people, there is none to

fill her place. I think He will not let her die.

Philip was telling me of a sister of his, Agnes, who died a long time ago. He has often spoken of her, but never so much as he did then. She just faded out as gradually and silently, dropping first one and then another of her duties, yet still going about the house and suffering no pain; until quite suddenly her strength gave way, and after only a few hours of manifest illness she died. Just like this white camellia of mine, whose flowers never fade or shrivel upon the stem, but blossom on pure and beautiful, until quickly and quietly they fall off, and I find them morning by morning lying on the ground.

I was silent after he told me; thinking of Maud—sorry that I should be thinking of her in that way, yet I could not help it. Philip's thoughts went in the same direction, too, for after we had been sitting still a little while, he began to speak of her, and it startled me so. But I think Maud will not die just yet.

When we were at home,—I call it home still,

though I have been away from it three years,—we often went to Lingold wood. Where should we go but to that spot, to which so many of my happiest, yet most solemn memories belong? How very sweet it looked in its summer beauty—sweeter to me because my eye has now become accustomed to this bleaker, more impressive mountain scenery of the north. Philip and I went one Sunday afternoon, and stood on the bridge, the wooden bridge over the lake, just where the little Mar brook runs into it. What a little while, what a very little while it seemed since we two had stood there that *other* Sunday afternoon, when the autumn leaves came flickering down and floating past us, and golden sunlight slanted in through the thinning branches, and the soft haze of the fading year lay upon all around! And you told me so much that afternoon, Philip, and we seemed to draw so near each other; little thinking how soon that wilfulness of mine should strike us apart, and keep us so for long. Yet we did care for each other, Philip, all through that long, dreary winter time.

I know it, for you have told me so since, and I am very proud to know it.

And so, Philip, leaning upon the little wooden bridge, and listening to the birds singing over our heads, and the wind swaying softly up through the long, green, chequered glades of the wood; and watching the golden sheen of sunlight upon the lake, and the gentle rippling wave of grass and fern—you and I spoke of all these things, through that long, bright Sunday afternoon; not forgetting to thank God for them; and trusting, too, that all coming months and years, falling one by one into the treasure-house of memory, might take there a story sweet and precious as these had done; one that we might always read in peace, knowing that God had written it for us.

And now another autumn has come, and I am home again—my own home, Philip's and mine, at this quiet village rectory of Elverton. It is early evening, and I am waiting for him coming back from that poor sick woman at the upper moor farm; then we shall have our own hour together.

What a pleasant home I have! — everything so winsome to look upon. The old ivied church, throwing the shadow of its tower quite across our lawn; the ever trickling sound of the mill stream just beyond the bridge; the purple sunlight cresting those grand hills in the distance; the soft, grey-like tints of coming twilight lying upon the eastern woods and meadows, — I always hoped I should live where there were plenty of woods, for shadow, and thought, and quietness. Then those long undulating black and olive-brown reaches of moorland, just like ours at Braeton, making by contrast the cloud-land distance look still more tender and transparent. And close at hand the busy little tide of village life; these strong-handed, loving-hearted labourers, that are always so kind to us; the pleasant feeling of trust and confidence that lies upon us all; the daily round of cares and duties that I find among these cottages — all within and all without — is healthful, and fresh, and free.

And now, thinking of these things,—of my

home, and my Philip, and my future, and all that God has given me ;—of the past too, those long, dreary first years of pride and selfishness, with the bitter tears they brought ;—of the alternate shade and sunlight that has crossed my path ;—of the dear face that watches me day by day ;—of the firm, kind will that ever holds mine steady and even ;—of our little child Maud, the memories that belong to her, and the hopes that go after her even yet ;—of the great quietness which has settled down upon my heart, once so restless and wayward : thinking of all these things, what can I say, what can I do, but take for my own Life-Psalm that beautiful poem which Philip brought me last night out of his study, and which seemed to both of us so worthy and true as we read it together ?

“ The west winds blow, and, singing low,
For me the glad streams run ;
The windows of my soul I throw
Wide open to the sun.

“ No longer forward or behind,
I look in doubt or fear ;
But thankful take the good I find,
The best of now and here.

"I break my pilgrim staff—I lay
 Aside the toiling oar ;
The angel sought so far away,
 I welcome at my door.

"All as God wills, who wisely heeds
 To give or to withhold,
And knoweth more of all my needs
 Than all my prayers have told.

"Enough that blessings undeserved
 Have mark'd my erring track ;
That wheresoe'er my footsteps swerved,
 Thy chastening held me back.

"That more and more a Providence
 Of love is understood,
Making the springs of time and sense
 Sweet with eternal good.

"That care and trial seem at last,
 In memory's sunset air,
Like mountain ranges overpast,
 In purple distance fair.

"And so the shadows fall apart,
 And so the west winds play ;
And all the windows of my heart
 I open to the day."

We will read it again, Philip, to-night.

CHAPTER XIII.

Yes, it was true as Mabel had said, Maud was not to die "just yet." He who had taken from her the one great hope of her life, gave her other work to do, that love, turned back from its first channel, and having no more any single track to go along, might flow out, rich and bright and cheering for all who needed it.

Little by little, sometimes by hard striving, sometimes with many tears, she came at last to learn the blessed, heaven-taught lesson, that there is no grief which does not turn towards us sooner or later the countenance and aspect of a friend, and stretch out to us hands laden with most sweet and precious gifts: so that we may think of it, not as a shadow upon our own life-track, but as a solemn companion walking by our side,

speaking to us from time to time, as we are able to bear them, those great truths which in our gay unthinking youth had been hidden from us; and gradually, as the journey lengthens to a close, showing us more of its hidden beauty; dropping off one by one its weeds of mourning that had covered the white and shining garments; until at last, in that glorious coming time when all need of earthly teaching is over, and the guerdon of rest won, our eyes are opened to see it as indeed it is—the messenger of God, the angel of discipline sent to guide us in the way.

There are many to whom this angel comes, who shrink fearfully from it, and will not listen to any words it might speak; who, when the first thrill of its awful presence has passed away, banish it from their sight, placing between it and them the mask of gaiety and worldly care, that they may look upon its face no more. They do not know how much they lose, nor how very gentle, by and by, it would have been to them, when they had learned to know it. They say of this angel whom God sends, “We will not have him to rule over us;” and straightway he departs,

having wrung from them his awful tribute, and leaving behind only a stinging memory of its loss. And then they cry out aloud for the friend he has taken, for the hope he has robbed them of, forgetful that the angel of sorrow never comes without healing in his wings for those who wait patiently for it.

There was plenty of work for Maud to do in Bracton; work that filled her heart with peace, and made the dark places bright, as all true work will do which God gives us to be performed for Him. Home duties that Mabel had left behind for her to take up; tender little cares for others' comfort; those innocent devices of household kindness which sprinkle the beaten path of daily life as with soft grass and pleasant-coloured flowers — very trifling, it may be, as some would look at them, but sacred when received as part of that continual ministry given to each of us; wherein nothing is noble, nothing ignoble, save as our using makes it so. Work in the village, where the tide of week-day cares went ebbing and flowing on; where there were many human hearts to suffer, and many toils to lighten, and

many wearied hands to help—none so ready for them all as Maud;—where there were many joys to be told, many hopes rising and falling, many anxieties fretting their little round — and none so wise to counsel as Maud. Work in her own heart, to trim the lamp of love and keep it shining out always bright over the home circle, that none of those who looked to her for rest and comfort should ever have them marred by any hasty word or fretful tone; and that no inner weariness of hers might chafe the gentleness of the outer life. Work, to gather strength and sweetness from the heavenly messenger walking by her side, so that others might take knowledge of her that she had been with Him. Work, to guard very purely the remembrance of Stephen Roden, that, when the meeting time came at last, he should know her for the same,—holier and more womanly for her grief, it is true, but still his, his only, his for ever. For she had promised him this long ago.

And so year by year the peacefulness deepened on Maud's face, and her voice grew sweeter, and her heart more full of love, and her life of quiet

kindness; which kindness others learned to receive at last, never wondering at it, it came so naturally, even as the very breath of her being: they would have wondered only if she had offered them anything else. And they ceased to speak of her in the village as "Miss Maud," and called her "our lady," blessing her as she passed them, and praying for her night by night.

Oh, how beautiful life may be, even when its brightest colours are gone, and the freshness of its first spring faded! How beautiful, when the tripping melodies of early hope have been gathered up and lost in the grand, sweet chords of faith; and patience rather than enjoyment has become the key-note of the harmony! How very wide the outlook which dawns upon the soul when the level fields of youthful promise are left behind, and the rough path of suffering overpast, and our feet firmly fixed on the mountain-top, care and weariness melt away in the soft haze of distance, and we weep over them no more! Fearing not for the future, nor mourning for the past, there is nothing for us to do

but wait calmly, hopefully, until the angel comes to guide our feet within the golden gates of the eternal land.

It was here Maud stood ; so waiting, so hoping. And as she looked out over the life-path left behind far away down in the valley, and as she tracked the rugged road which had led her to the mountain-top where storm and tempest come no more, and as there came down upon her ever and anon a waft of light and music from the land which was not very far off now, she smiled and said, "It is well ; it is very well."

CHAPTER XIV.

“So providential, Mrs. Harcourt, so *very* providential. I’m a child of many mercies, I am indeed; and I’m sure I could feel called upon to return public thanks in church, only I should feel afraid of exciting remark. And then to think, you know, that it should have happened so nicely, just when I had been making myself four new flannel petticoats and a set of winter stockings, to say nothing of giving a finishing eye to my wardrobe in a general way, and making myself ready for anything that might happen; and just when I had been thinking that I really should be obliged to leave that cottage of mine on account of the blackbeetles — they give me such a turn if I have to go down into the cellar after dark.

But it's providential, Mrs. Harcourt, it is indeed; and that's all I can say about it."

And Miss Gabbatis fluttered down into a seat by the window, and began to give a few little beautifying touches to her outer woman. For she had evidently come from home in a state of inward perturbation which had caused the point of her shawl to be at least a quarter of a yard out of the perpendicular, and the brown bow on the summit of her bonnet to twist round with a somewhat one-sided effect, to say nothing of sundry little irregularities in the minor departments; and there was a vivacious springiness in all her motions, and a bustling activity on the part of her little grey curls dancing about inside her bonnet cap, which proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Miss Gabbatis had "something on her mind."

"And then," she continued, "such a blessing for the dear children, you know, especially at this season of the year, to have an experienced individual to look after them, and give an eye to their little coughs and colds—it really is so providential. But, if you'll excuse me mentioning

it, Mrs. Harcourt, you don't strike me as being quite suitably affected; and I'm sure I've come as fast as my legs would carry me all the way from my cottage this morning, as soon as ever I'd seen the dinner on a safe track, that I might be the first to tell you, the very first, you know, because I always say there's no one so pleased as Mrs. Harcourt, in a general way, to rejoice with those that do rejoice."

"When I know what I'm to rejoice about," said Mrs. Harcourt, leaning back in her chair, with a quiet smile.

"Deary me, now! well, to be sure, how stupid! But really I *have* such a way of forgetting my antecedents. It was just the same when I began writing my book on the management of children; and, by the bye, I'm afraid I shant't get it finished in time for the publishing season now. I dropped straight down into the middle of the end chapter, and worked backwards way until I got half-way through. I mean, you know, my dear friend, that a change has taken place; or rather my maiden freedom is on the point of capitulating in favour of — or at least, you understand, an

opportunity has been afforded — but the fact is, Mrs. Harcourt, I am going to be married.”

“Miss Gabbatis ! ”

“Yes, I really am,” and Miss Gabbatis reached over her shoulder in pursuit of her bonnet strings which had gone in that direction, and tucked them inside her shawl. “Things *do* turn out so very remarkably, as I said before, and there’s no such thing as saying what’s going to be laid out for you. I’m sure goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and I’m going to live in the prettiest little house you can imagine, with two sitting-rooms to the front and a kitchen back, with such a delightful oven and boiler, and four sleeping-rooms above, besides out-places, and a small piece of ground where I can cultivate a few turnips on my own account—you know I’m so fond of turnips. I do assure you, Mrs. Harcourt, I feel quite drawn out in thankfulness.”

Mrs. Harcourt’s face brightened, as it always did for any happiness that came to others. Miss Gabbatis accepted the smile in place of words, and continued,—

"Yes, I was sure you would receive my prospects with open arms, or I shouldn't have felt called upon to mention them to you. It's a pleasant look-out, it really is, and such a delightful little family to go into."

"Then the gentleman is a widower?"

"Exactly so. I ought to have mentioned that before, but really I was in such a state of pleasing perturbation that I forgot to state the preliminary facts of the case. Yes, a widower. I have always turned my attention to a widower as being the most likely opening after I entered on my fifty-fifth year. And then, you know, my dear Mrs. Harcourt—for I've turned it over in my own mind a good deal of late—a man that's been married once knows what to expect, and can make allowances for little shortcomings in his shirt buttons and cookery; whereas a man who enters the matrimonial state for the first time in his life thinks he's going right away into Paradise without any more to do, and you're always on the fidget to keep him from finding out his mistake, and yet you know he must find it out some time or other. Now, you see,

a widower has got over all that sort of thing, and really knows what to expect, and doesn't look out for Paradise when he goes to house-keeping a second time; and makes up his mind to a few little hitches and deficiencies in domestic arrangements now and then. So that, on the whole, Mrs. Harcourt, I think I've done the right thing in the right place by taking poor Mr. Smithson and his family under my care."

"Ah! Mr. Smithson, that gentleman who came to Braeton nearly four years since. Don't you remember, Miss Gabbatis, telling us he was likely to come, one evening a long time ago?"

"That night, you mean, soon after Miss Mabel — dear me, how stupid! I mean Mrs. Lowe — came home from Scarbro'. To think that she should have been married this three years, and I haven't learned to give her her proper title yet! And we were talking, if you remember, about the overplus of female population in Braeton, a very serious subject too; but things *do* turn out so remarkably. I'm sure I shall never be surprised at anything

again as long as I live. To think, you know, that any one should take the trouble to come and pick me out, after I'd lain so long at the bottom of the basket that all the bloom had got rubbed off me in a manner, and nobody would have supposed there'd been a bit of taste left in me worth speaking of!—it's providential, it really is. But then, Mrs. Harcourt, I always said the fruit that had lain longest in the basket—the old residents, you understand—should have the first chance, especially with a widower; don't you think so, now?"

Mrs. Harcourt did think so, and expressed an opinion to that effect; whereupon Miss Gabbatis felt drawn out to offer a little more circumstantial information as to the origin and progress of the change in her prospects.

"You see, Mrs. Harcourt, having as I said lain so long at the bottom of the basket, I had quite made up my mind to stay there altogether; and lately, when anybody came my way who was likely to be wanting a little fruit—in a figurative sense, you know—I haven't thought it worth while to come forward and

see if there was any chance of getting off; because, you see, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, the Braeton basket is so heaped up with fruit, it really is, and the apples at the top have such nice rosy cheeks and look so round and plump, that really when any Adams go past they just pick one off that comes handy, and never trouble themselves to see if there are any lying underneath that they might get cheap. And, in fact, with being there so long, and getting accustomed to the situation, I began to think the bottom of the basket was a very comfortable place, and I didn't care much whether I ever was asked to leave it or not."

"That is a very convenient frame of mind to cultivate, especially in Braeton, where there is so much fruit to sell and so few people to buy. But I dare say, Miss Gabbatis, it was just because you had made up your mind to your position that you were invited to change it."

"Very likely; things go so much by contraries now-a-days, and when people make up their minds to anything, it's a pretty sure sign they'll have to take them to pieces again before long.

At least that's been *my* experience. But to return to the subject. You know I've always made it a point, a very sharp point, never to offer anything more than civility to Mr. Smithson since he came, on account of his being a widower, and me an unmarried female with a position to sustain; although I'm sure, to tell the truth, I often felt very much drawn out to run across and have a little chat with him of an evening; because you see we have lived so handy, and really, poor man, he looked so lonely sitting there in the bow-window, and had such a sinking-in at his chest, with just nothing else but getting no exercise in the way of talking. I always say, Mrs. Harcourt, a little bit of chat is the finest thing in the world for anybody that's delicate; it stretches the lungs nicely, you know. I don't think for my own part I should ever have been reared up to years of discretion if it hadn't been for having a conversational tendency—it kept my chest always supplied with fresh air; and I'm sure, if Mr. Smithson reaps no other benefit from his second marriage, it will be quite a consideration to have some one who will keep his

internal economy nicely aired by means of a bit of chat now and then."

"That's a new view of the subject, and ought to be very conducive to second marriages; but I want to know, Miss Gabbatis, how it came about?"

"Of course, and that's just what I came to tell you. I said to myself, as soon as ever he was safely out of the house, 'Well, I *must* go and get a cup of tea with Mrs. Harcourt on the strength of this.' As I was telling you before, you know, there's never been anything but civility between us on account of my position as an unmarried female, and I was so very much afraid of any reports getting about—as we live so near together, you see—that really I felt quite twittery whenever I met Mr. Smithson, and I was turning it over in my own mind whether it wouldn't be better to give over sitting so much in that little parlour of mine, and live entirely to the back, to disarm suspicion, you know, if such a thing should happen to exist in the village. And I had just fixed to measure the width of my upstairs windows, and get some black gauze blinds made, because you see they're so very near to Mr. Smith-

son's, on the opposite side, and I couldn't slip upstairs on a sudden to tidy my front hair without running the risk of being overlooked; and that, you know, isn't a pleasant thing to meditate upon for an unmarried female in my position, is it now, Mrs. Harcourt?"

"Not exactly, but we haven't come to the kernel of the matter yet."

"We're not very far from it though, if you'll only let me come to it like a crab, sideways. You know I always was remarkable for little flying discussions when I'm telling anything, and I like to put things shipshape as I go along. Well, then, as I was going to say, I was reared up at my front bedroom window, measuring it for a black gauze blind, when I heard a knock at the door, and my maid brought me up a note from Mr. Smithson, requesting the favour of an interview at my earliest convenience, and saying that the bearer would wait for an answer. Well, you see, it was rather inconvenient, for I happen to have been very much taken up with odds and ends this week. Last Tuesday, when the note came, was our fortnight's wash; then, of course, after

that came the mangling and ironing and folding, and putting away the things, so that really I'd no time for interviews; and, besides, I'd got my best dress to pieces to be cleaned, and I'm sure I haven't another fit to receive a gentleman in. But, as an answer was wanted on the spot, I fixed Thursday—yesterday, you know—and then went on measuring for the gauze blind, intending to go to Marbrook next day to buy the stuff.

“ Well, do you know, I felt this interview on my mind very much. I couldn't think whatever was to come of it, and I'd a presentiment that something unpleasant was going to happen. You know servants are incautious sometimes, and it wasn't at all clear to me but what my maid had been opening out to Mr. Smithson's cook, as I've noticed of late that they always contrive to be scouring down the front steps together, and make a very long business of it, so much so, in fact, that I invariably have to ring the back parlour bell for Betsy before I can get her in again. And then I turned it over in my thoughts if ever I'd chanced to say anything in the course of conversation which could have been nipped up.

and put about to make mischief, because, being, you know, of a chatty turn of disposition, I do slip out a good many remarks from time to time; and really, when I was saying my prayers at night, it quite disturbed my thoughts; but I committed it to Providence, and then curled my hair as nicely as I could, ready for the interview."

"On the principle of the union of church and state," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"Exactly so; just what I say when I see the multiplication table on the back of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism. And a very good principle, too: capital thing for this country is church and state. Well, when I got up in the morning, I didn't take my hair out of paper as I generally do, because it threatened for dampness; and if you remember, Mrs. Harcourt, it *did* turn out very damp yesterday, and nothing takes the curl out of hair so soon. So I left the papers in, and then told the maid to light a fire in the front parlour, and get the holland covers taken off, and set the ornaments about, and make the room look as genteel as she could; for you know it was

my first interview with Mr. Smithson, and I felt it necessary to rise to the dignity of the situation, and represent my position in a proper light. And I took my dear brother's portrait out of the cupboard, and hung it up in a good light, that he might see I had connections in the church. You know it has his autograph, Peter Gabbatis, underneath, so that everybody may see he belongs to my family. And then, as three o'clock drew on, I put on my second-best dress. It was so exceedingly unfortunate the other one with the green stripes was in pieces, for green suits my complexion so much better; however, I made out the difference as well as I could by a nice collar and neck riband, and then took my netting and sat down in the front room to wait for him."

"Feeling slightly perturbed?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Harcourt; I can't say but what I *was* a little bit all-overish, and I felt my nose growing very red, as it always does when I get excited; but as I'd left the whole affair to Providence, I thought I couldn't do better than let it stay there, especially as I didn't know.

what to make of it myself. Well, exactly as the clock struck three he came, and I rose to receive him with a pleasing consciousness of looking as well as circumstances would permit — though, of course, I couldn't help regretting the green stripes, and I really would have given anything to have been able to have turned round and just given a look into the chimney-glass to see my general effect; but you know that wouldn't have answered. Well, then, you know, I requested him to be seated, taking good care to keep him a proper distance from the window, because, you see, if Miss Tim or Mrs. Sharrup had happened to have come past and seen such a thing as a widower sitting in my front parlour, it would have been all over the village directly. And then I waited to hear what was coming, feeling sure, you know, it would be some piece of unpleasantness or other connected with the scouring of the front steps. Well, we began to talk about the weather. I told him what sort of a day it was, and he told me what sort of a night it had been; and then we both expressed our opinion that the dampness would

turn out rain. After that I couldn't think of anything else to say, though in a general way I'm so very chatty, and often wish that people could talk in short-hand, that they might get more into the time. And he didn't seem as if he could think of anything either, and really it was getting very awkward. Well, at long last, when I'd netted a whole row, and felt the colour settling into the end of my nose as fast as it could go; he began to fidget about as if something was coming, and hoped I would excuse his mentioning the subject so abruptly, but it had been on his mind for some time, and he had only been waiting for a suitable opportunity of expressing it. Of course I prepared myself for something unpleasant, and began to think what I could say."

"And instead of that it turned out to be——"

"Exactly, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, that is just what it turned out to be; the very thing, neither more nor less, but just that."

"And you replied of course that you preferred remaining at the bottom of the basket, as you found the place such a very comfortable one?"

“Oh! Mrs. Harcourt, you have such a way of putting things. You know circumstances alter cases, and nobody likes to stop at the bottom of the basket when there’s a chance of getting out of it altogether. And so I let him remain in doubt a little while, and then yielded to the gentle pressure. Not but what I’d meant to say *yes* all along, after I found what he had come for; but just you know it makes a thing seem more valuable when you don’t get it all at once. I’m sure I never wanted that tortoise-shell cat of mine half so much as when Sir Everard’s housekeeper made such a fuss about keeping it for the servant’s hall, and the same principle goes through life, you know.”

“And if we may venture to peep into the future, Miss Gabbatis, pray when is the great event to take place?”

“In two months, Mrs. Harcourt; not a day later.’ I always said I disliked long engagements. The thinner the apple’s pared the better; and then you know it isn’t convenient to have people coming and going about the house, and me an unprotected female too; but deary me, yonder’s

Miss Maud coming up the garden from her class, it must be nearly five o'clock ; going about doing good she's been—always going about doing good ; I declare she makes me feel quite ashamed of myself. But you know, Mrs. Harcourt, I always say some people are born into the world angels ready made, and want nothing but a pair of wings to take them straight away into heaven. Always living in preparation, you see ; it's such a delightful state of mind. Miss Maud really has her affections so sweetly staid upon heavenly things, it's quite a privilege to have anything to do with her, and as soon as I've got this wedding comfortably over, I mean to take pattern and cultivate the same sort of thing myself."

"And really now, Mrs. Harcourt," and Miss Gabbatis leaned back in the rocking chair and looked down the sunlit autumn garden, where the crimson leaves were drifting to and fro, and the grey haze of early evening falling, "really when I come to think about all these things, how very providentially everything has been laid

out for us, how nicely and quietly we are getting sent along in the right way—you and Mr. Harcourt here so comfortable together, and such a pleasant home, and dear Miss Mabel up yonder so delightfully settled with a husband, and on such a safe track for heaven;—and when I think about my own comforts too, a nice, cosy married life provided for me without any care or contrivance on my part, as I may say, so perfectly unlooked for, you know, and yet the very thing I had been wanting so long;—and when I see dear Miss Maud so calm and peaceful, in such a prepared state, as I may say, for a home up above, and so wonderfully sustained considering all that she's passed through—and poor dear Mr. Roden too, although he was taken so very suddenly, and gave us all such a terrible shock, yet you know so very safely landed, in sure and certain hope, as our dear clergyman says, of a joyful resurrection—when I think about all this, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, I am quite overcome, I am indeed, and I don't know what to say, I really don't; there don't seem to be any words turn up to express one's feelings.”

“Except these,” said Maud, who had come quietly in, and was standing within the window in that autumn sunlight, “except these —

“ ‘He hath done all things well.’ ”

EPILOGUE.

YEARS have passed away. Maud and Miss Nunly are watching daylight out in the dining-room of Braeton Lodge.

It is early in September. The first crimson streaks of autumn, and the green beauty of summer time, meet and mingle on the Lingold Wood. One by one, few and far between, the yellow leaves fall into the lake and flutter away amid copse and fern to the little Mar brook. A soft, warm haze lies gently on the distant trees, and creeps over the Downshire hills, and spreads like a transparent veil across the purple moorlands with their rifts and craggy torrent-beds. Over Glinton Manor too, with its quaint old-fashioned English garden, where the yellow sunflowers look up broad and bright, and the old cypress

stretches its arms athwart the wood, and the green lily leaves float dreamily upon the fountain pond, and the grey old gables rise there yet with their antique carving and brazen vanes, the same—just the same—when other things have long since changed. With a very warm golden light, the sun creeps downward through the leaves of the great old beech tree at the bottom of the Lodge garden, and then up the straight orchard path where the stray leaves fall with a pleasant rustling sound through the tangled grass; and level bars of shadow lie across and across, growing longer as the day declines. Everything is very still, very peaceful, very full of quiet Sabbath-like beauty, just as it always is at Braeton in the early autumn time.

Maud's work was done at last, all her trust fulfilled. Through those long years she had held it very faithfully, never wearying over it, never bringing to it other than a tender, loving heart. And although to do it wisely and well had left some lines of thought upon her forehead, and laid one or two silver touches upon the hair that used to be so brown and shining;

and although the right hand faltered sometimes as it tried to obey the willing heart in its behests of love, yet she went on bravely and steadily to the end, never passing by one unperformed duty, never stepping over one cross which ought to be lifted and carried; until, all being finished, there was nothing left for her to do, but only to die.

Which she did very quietly, as everything else that Maud had to do had been done. One by one the daily journeys into the village were shortened, until the people ceased to listen for her step, or wait for the benediction of her presence; and prayed for her always with tears. Then the customary little household duties were laid aside, because there was no strength left for them. Still it was easy to think the end was far off yet. For the colour came and went in her face as it had always done, and her voice had the pleasant, well-remembered tone, without one touch of weariness or pain; and the smile, almost the old child-smile of those long ago days, was folded down upon her lips. And there was still the same sweet dignity in every look

and motion, the same gentle, unselfish thought for others, which seemed as if it could neither change nor cease, so freely did it always come. Just as it had been given and received in that home for years and years past, until they had learned to think of it as we do of daily light and sunshine.

She was lying back, close by the window, in the great easy chair, and Miss Nunly stood beside her. They had been holding long speech of years past, as they looked out into the garden and watched the sunlight creeping up and down, flickering in and out among the leaves, and making broad, soft shadows upon the lawn and the long reaches of meadow-land beyond. But now a great silence had fallen between them for thought and memory to work in. It deepened the lines on Miss Nunly's face, and laid a weary cloud upon her forehead, did that long silence; but to Maud's it brought only a deeper, more intense peace. Once more, and for the last time, ere it was given to her again for ever, there came that far back little golden year of hope, the hope that had changed the

current of her whole life, and whose loss had worked out for her such noble compensation. It came to her in its earthly likeness, for just one more loving look, and she said farewell to it very quietly, knowing that it would be only a little while before she saw it again, transfigured into heavenly beauty, hers for ever. Standing in the light of the new world, the shadows of this one passed away, and she remembered only the joy. Drawing so near, step by step to the eternal gates, which no thought of sadness might find leave to enter, the angel of sorrow that had companied her through all these years, let fall his garb of mourning, and she beheld him as one of the shining ones. What need, then, for the glory to come down upon her face as she thought of these things?

Little by little the sunshine crept away, all but a few last golden streaks, leaving behind it on the trees and the distant hills a very soft purple haze before the grey twilight came. And the sparkles of light died off and away from the old beech tree and the grassy orchard path, where they two had so often walked; and all was

sinking slowly, silently into the hush of early evening, wherein nature makes no sign but that half-perceptible undertone of change and decay which is heard in autumn time, when things are wending to their rest.

And then, slowly winding round through the Marbrook valley, with a broken, uncertain sigh, came once again the whistle of the railway train; not sharp and ringing now, but with a dim, half-stifled tone, as it cleft its way through the falling mists, then sobbed along past Lingold Wood and across Braeton plantation, until far away in the open country it wore itself out in a low, plaintive, eerie sort of wail, that could be clearly tracked for long in that evening silence.

The sound woke Miss Nunly from her dream, and turned her eyes, full of pitying sympathy, upon Maud. Must that harsh, untuneful voice always come between her and the memory of the past? must she ever so be listening to the story of his death?

No! For there was not even a quiver on the shut eyelids, not a touch of pain on the lips,

to which the quiet smile had just come back. And then, bending over her, Miss Nunly saw that the warm light upon her face was given there by the lingering sunlight only.

It was all over. The "little while," so long waited for, so patiently endured, was gone at last. Stephen Roden and Maud would never have to part any more now, never any more at all.

"And so He bringeth them to the haven where they would be."

THE END.

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